

**RECLAIMING THE OUTCAST:
A STUDY OF THE WRITINGS OF HESBA STRETTON IN THEIR
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

Hesba Stretton (Sarah Smith 1832-1911) is known today primarily as a writer of evangelical fiction for the juvenile market. Yet the range of her work is extensive, traversing the boundaries of adult-child literature. This study undertakes to re-examine Stretton's neglected oeuvre, situating it within the broad social and cultural context of its production and exposing the depth/complexity of its engagement with prominent ideas, debates and discourses.

The thesis identifies Stretton's preoccupation with a spectrum of interrelated figures/sections of outcast/marginalised society. It locates her writings within a network of overlapping and mutually constituted discourses which participate in a wider, multifaceted discourse of otherness at the heart of Victorian society. Major themes and images are explored/contextualised within this framework and related to diverse forms of literary/extra-literary expression. The interimbrication of gender, race and class, of material, fictional and mythical elements and of social, moral, psychological and melodramatic aspects emerges as central. Contradictions, ambiguities and cross-currents facilitate multiple responses; progressive, interrogative and mediatory/revisionary forces, in tension with conservatism, are identified throughout.

The Introduction establishes the focus/structure of the project and sets out the rationale for a hybrid critical approach. Part I explores private and public spheres, personal and textual preoccupations, and anticipates the concerns of Part II. Chapter 1 investigates biographical perspectives, utilising a range of primary sources to reveal areas of intersection/contradiction and potentially subversive energies. Chapter 2 focuses on issues of publication/reception, drawing on archival and textual material to identify overlapping/converging interests, intended/potential audiences and generic interplay.

Part II explores textual, contextual and intertextual roles, representations and social relations, emphasising the construction/mediation of difference across diverse interrelated areas. Questions of identity, inequality, authority, agency and the representation of the marginalised are foregrounded.

In Chapter 3, a discussion of nineteenth-century child images prefaces the examination of motifs of exclusion/deprivation, exploitation/empowerment, role-inversion and boundary-crossing. Chapter 4 traces sexual subtexts/currents in the light of contemporary anxieties/preoccupations; Chapter 5 investigates concepts/experiences of womanhood/the maternal, highlighting the operation/interrogation of patriarchal and class-inflected patterns/mechanisms. Chapter 6 scrutinises images of outcast society, examining discourses/representations of the city and particular figures/classes, including the criminal, the delinquent, the Jew, the gypsy and the savage, in the context of overlapping perceptions/metaphors of otherness. Chapter 7 investigates Stretton's personal and textual preoccupation with the persecuted Russian Stundists, and her association with prominent exiled anarchists.

The study establishes the contemporary/continuing significance of Stretton's writings, expanding the boundaries of critical discussion to produce a reconceptualisation which confirms her work as fertile ground for serious and ongoing study.

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INTRODUCTION

Hesba Stretton (Sarah Smith 1832-1911)¹ is best known today as a writer of evangelical fiction for children. Her name is permanently linked in the popular imagination with the highly successful - and deceptively simple - 'waif' narrative, Jessica's First Prayer, first published in book form by The Religious Tract Society in 1867 and followed by other best-selling 'street Arab' titles such as Little Meg's Children (1868) and Alone in London (1869). Although Stretton's reputation associates her primarily with the juvenile market, the range of her work is extensive; much of her writing occupies uncertain territory on the boundary between adult and children's literature, in terms of theme and potential readership. She produced more than sixty books, including numerous full-length novels directed at an adult audience (some for the secular market), as well as stories and articles of journalism for periodicals such as Dickens's Household Words and All The Year Round. Importantly, the issues addressed in Stretton's writing are much broader than is generally recognised. Her work is notable for its interaction with a range of prominent nineteenth-century social, cultural and political debates, and for its engagement with many of the interests and anxieties of the period. Stretton was an active campaigner on social issues, both through her writing, and through practical activities. Along with philanthropists such as Baroness Burdett-Coutts and Benjamin Waugh, she was a founder member of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and worked towards the reform of attitudes and legislation in areas such as poverty, juvenile crime and women's rights.

Bibliographies and histories of children's literature have situated Stretton's writing chiefly within the context of evangelical 'street Arab' tales; consequently, whilst her influence in this field has been acknowledged, entries have centred on a limited area of her work. Commentators have emphasised the contemporary popularity of her narratives, but have, for the most part, only briefly discussed - or dismissed - them as belonging to a body of didactic, simplistic and, to modern taste, overly religious and

sentimental writing, a position which has served to foreclose more fruitful exploration of this literature.

Existing critical studies are relatively limited in extent and perspective. Several accounts appeared during the 1970s and early 1980s, but despite the fact that projects such as those of Lance Salway (1970), M. Nancy Cutt (1979) and J.S. Bratton (1981) pointed to the complexity and socio-historical significance of Stretton's writings, few critics have seriously engaged with the issues raised. Salway, in 'Pathetic Simplicity: An Introduction to Hesba Stretton and Her Books for Children' (1970), supplies a brief outline of Stretton's life and work, and discusses a number of her texts in the context of contemporary social injustice, philanthropy and reform. He notes her sensational plots, and suggests links with the work of Dickens in terms of humour and characterisation. A more comprehensive biographical and socio-historical overview is provided in M. Nancy Cutt's Ministering Angels (1979), a study of evangelical writing for children. In a chapter devoted to Stretton's life, and in wider discussions of poverty and social reform, Cutt contextualises Stretton's activities and aspects of her writing, identifying her as a 'genuine social reformer' (154). J.S. Bratton's significant study The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (1981) examines Stretton's work in the context of evangelical publishing; in a section which focuses on waif romances, she charts the development of Stretton's work and her influence on subsequent writers of the genre.

Essays/chapters published during the 1990s by Patricia Demers, Sally Mitchell and Suzanne Rickard have augmented the body of criticism, offering valuable insights into aspects of Stretton's work. Patricia Demers's (1991) essay focuses on the work of Hesba Stretton and Mrs. Sherwood, exploring Romantic influences and issues of agency/empowerment. Demers concludes, in relation to theoretical arguments about the restrictions of gender, that there is nothing 'apologetic' or lacking in authority about the words or practical activities of the writers under discussion (131). In an analysis of girls' culture, The New Girl (1995), Sally Mitchell considers the appeal of Stretton's work in relation to the affective power of popular texts. Discussing the possible effects of narratives of this kind on the inner lives of girls, Mitchell identifies the potential for both emotional release and empowerment, and suggests the possibility of different levels of psychological/emotional engagement. Suzanne Rickard ("Living by the Pen": Hesba Stretton's Moral Earnings', 1996) draws on the accounts and findings of earlier

critics and extends discussion of Stretton's work in the context of nineteenth-century women writers and the publishing establishment. She notes the boundary-crossing nature of Stretton's dealings with publishers, and suggests a re-evaluation of the author as an incipient feminist.

Despite such moves to broaden the critical base, however, analysis of Stretton's writings is still comparatively undeveloped. Many areas - indeed, many narratives - have remained unexplored. Scholars have not embraced the range of her work, nor located it imaginatively within the broad social, cultural and political context indicated by comprehensive examination and contextualisation. The wide-ranging implications of underlying themes and motifs have been largely overlooked, the potential for complex readings and multiple engagement underestimated; critics have, for the most part, failed to appreciate the amenability of Stretton's work to wider theorisation, or to recognise it as a medium for examining crucial aspects of the nineteenth-century imagination. It is necessary to move beyond the obstacles created/perpetuated by received wisdom, and to overcome a reluctance to engage at a deeper level with what has been regarded by many as outdated material, in order to uncover the social, political, moral and emotional complexities of Hesba Stretton's writing.

This project sets out to reclaim and re-examine the range of Stretton's work, to locate it more comprehensively within the circumstances of its production, and to highlight its intertextuality with diverse forms of cultural expression. My study undertakes to explore these marginalised narratives not only alongside those of a similar genre, but also in relation to more widely discussed 'classic' works (for both adults and children), and in the light of contemporary forms such as journalism, social reportage, visual art and melodrama.² In so doing, it seeks to (re)open debate concerning the appeal and significance of Stretton's writing, and, in the process of rediscovery, reconceptualisation and re-evaluation, to widen the parameters of discussion.

Examination of Hesba Stretton's writings confirms the centrality of the abandoned or outcast child. The waif, however, is by no means the only variety of outcast; this investigation uncovers other voices and stories within these texts, revealing an engagement with the situation of diverse marginalised, disenfranchised or persecuted figures/sections of society. A particularly striking feature across Stretton's oeuvre is her

preoccupation with the lot of the woman, and with the complexities of motherhood and the maternal bond. The author's concerns embrace outcast society at large, drawing attention to figures such as the criminal, the prostitute, the delinquent, the Jew, the gypsy and the foreigner, and highlighting the cultural/literary motifs and discourses which surround these figures. My study locates Stretton's narratives within a network of overlapping and mutually constituted discourses, which encompass religion, sexuality, poverty, pollution, the body, social/moral reform, education and colonialism. The diverse strands of otherness embodied in her work form part of a wider, multi-faceted discourse of otherness at the heart of Victorian society. These writings expose the simultaneous fear and allure of that which is perceived as different, unknown or undesirable; they highlight the overlap and interdependence of concepts and issues of gender, generation, race and class, and of multiple practices/experiences of exclusion, separation and loss.

The identification of these interconnected strands affords a framework for the present investigation, establishing a foundation for the exploration of Stretton's literary and practical undertaking, and illuminating the nature of her participation, intervention and mediation within a wider cultural matrix. The dynamics of power, the circulation of dominant perceptions/mythologies, the construction of identity and difference emerge as central concerns. Stretton's writing provides an arena for examining responses to the outcast or 'other' in all its guises, and a base from which to explore wider ideas and representations; it illustrates the manner in which cultural assumptions are shaped, perpetuated or modified, and embodies the uncertainties, tensions and conflicts being worked out in a changing society, and within the individual self.

This concept of a web of 'otherness', in which multiple issues of marginality inhere, operates at the level of text, context, and, indeed, of the present critical project. The texts themselves can be regarded as literary outcasts - excluded or marginalised by the critical establishment on several accounts. Firstly, their designation as children's literature pinpoints their categorisation as 'other' to adult literature and signals a subordinate status over time within the publishing/literary establishment and academic arena, notwithstanding a gradual recognition of the importance of serious approaches to children's literature and childhood studies. Within the hierarchy of children's literature/criticism, texts such as these have often figured as the excluded 'other', the

genre cast aside in favour of apparently less didactic, more liberating, imaginative/fantasy modes,³ or rejected out of hand because its religious emphasis is alien to modern, secular modes of thought.

As the product of a woman's pen, Stretton's writings occupy doubly or triply-marginalised terrain, although in recent years the project of re-examining and revaluing historical texts for/about children, by women writers, has contributed to a reclamation of the voice and status of both groups.⁴ Categorised as 'popular' fiction, Stretton's narratives may be regarded as 'other' in relation to texts designated 'literary', despite the fact that examination reveals semantic density and a preoccupation with serious ideas, as well as qualities of playfulness and self-reflexivity. At the same time, as material aimed at the popular market and reaching a mass audience, they can be seen to provide valuable insights into the culture of their production/reception. Challenging dominant notions of propriety and worth, Hesba Stretton embraces 'outcast' themes, exposing and confronting subject matter often deemed improper, unworthy of attention or inexpressible - but which, significantly, holds appeal precisely because of its engagement with such taboos/silences. Her writing addresses existential issues which are both particular and universal, its preoccupation with otherness/difference tapping into desires and fears operating in the individual and collective psyche.

Textually and contextually, this premise operates, at various levels, across the diverse groups and identities which figure within Stretton's narratives. It is implicit in the construction of the child as 'other' to the adult, and between categories of child in terms of character and social status; it operates in the oppositions/dyadic models set up between sinful and angelic child, between the primitive or heathen and the enlightened or educated. The poor or working-class child is defined in opposition to the middle-class child, with moral and material qualities confused or elided. Within the category of poor child, the street urchin, vagrant or beggar, the young criminal or potential felon are set against the 'respectable, 'deserving' or hard-working child/adolescent and his family, and conflated with the 'low-life' element as the feared/excluded of society. In all instances, the precariousness of boundaries, the ease with which one may become 'the other', is paramount.

The notion of otherness is, of course, inscribed in the longstanding subordination of women, and in the persistent designations of inferiority or excess which reflect the perceived threat to male dominance and the internalisation by both sexes of 'normalised' cultural codes. It is further played out in the binaries which construct versions of womanhood - in the opposition, for example, between virgin and whore, and in representations of, and responses to, figures such as the prostitute or fallen woman. As this study demonstrates, it is apparent in the idealisation, yet marginalisation in practical terms, of the institution of motherhood, and in the divisions constructed between good and bad maternal models, between the self-sacrificing, nurturing ideal and the neglectful slum mother or malevolent step-parent. Constructions/assumptions of otherness underpin the response of society to the old, the infirm, the poor, and those whose difference is inscribed in their nationality, race, creed or perceived lack of civilisation. Crucially, these patterns operate in multiple permutations - within and between classes, genders and groups, between structures of authority and the individual or subculture, and within the self (individual or collective) - evidencing the perpetual urge to categorise, establish boundaries and construct difference. At the same time, Stretton's narratives foreground the instinct to harness/encourage understanding, solidarity and co-operation within and across borders.

An integrated study of Stretton's representations highlights significant areas of convergence; attitudes, perceptions and experiences are shown to be inextricably intertwined. In the case of all the figures under consideration, parallel issues of relations of power and abuse of authority apply.⁵ All groups are subject to similar systems of surveillance, to corresponding processes of control/discipline, to comparable and overlapping practices/discourses - overt and insidious - of repression, enslavement and exploitation, enculturation and domestication, commodification and sentimentalisation. Across these areas, responses to the 'other' are marked by an ambivalence which reflects an interplay of fascination and revulsion, of concern, compassion, and distancing - an intermingling of the desire to build on the notion of a common humanity and the urge to deflect or contain an amorphous, ever-present threat which betokens chaos and disintegration. Likewise, throughout this web, questions about the possibility of agency, subversion and resistance to authority/the dominant order are crucial, as are issues of mutual support/nurture and the breaking down of

barriers. Importantly, experiences of oppression, rejection and alienation are shared between different categories of outcast; the textual enactment of these promotes engagement with material, emotional and psychological deprivation across social spheres. Outsiders of all kinds, from all classes, may, like the middle-class protagonist of Stretton's The Doctor's Dilemma (1872), who runs away from an oppressive marital home, find themselves 'as wretched and friendless as any [creature] the streets of London contained' (Part 1, Ch.3).⁶ The elaboration of this concept of otherness or exclusion highlights not only the interdependence of these areas, but the relationship of processes of division in society to divisions within the self, the interplay between the material, the discursive and the psychological. The interconnectedness of themes across Stretton's work draws attention to the role of language/metaphor in reflecting, creating, and 'naturalising' perceptions of otherness/difference through the generation of multiple and transferable signifiers across diverse representational and discursive fields. At the same time, as we shall discover, ambiguous symbolism potentialises meaning at levels beyond that of the surface story.

The present project casts a searchlight onto such issues, and explores their enactment in Stretton's writings, both personal and published. Consideration is given to the problems inherent in the representation of marginalised figures and the recovery of neglected or suppressed voices, and to the effects of differences/convergences between the concerns of the writer and those of the communities she seeks to represent.⁷ M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 133) suggests that Stretton writes from the 'viewpoint of the submerged' in society. Whilst I would agree, in principle, with this assertion, it is necessary to look closely at the legitimacy and effectiveness of such an endeavour. Perry Nodelman (1992, 29) discusses the problems of writing about 'the other', stressing that 'Representations of those who can't see or speak for themselves are and must always be engendered by outsiders'.⁸ Questions must be raised about the extent to which it is possible for Stretton, from an essentially middle-class and adult perspective, to recover and relate the story of the outcast - to take the part, for example, of the child, the deprived woman/mother or the criminal. We must examine her engagement - across an inevitable gap - with perspective of the 'other', and identify the ambivalence inscribed in her representations. The issue of the outsider's gaze - the complexities and potential interrelationship between textual, extra-textual and 'real life' voyeurism - must be

addressed. Stretton's endeavour is inextricably bound up with society's approaches, at a practical, political and spiritual level, towards material projects of reclamation and the various programmes which underpin them. We shall want to ask: Is an understanding of the outcast or oppressed as victim complicated by internalised perceptions which betray the drive to distance or condemn? Is the purpose of reclamation to liberate or alternatively to contain and mould/civilise, and to what extent are these aims confused or complicated? How far can fictional reconfigurations of social and power relations, demonstrations of agency or transgressive currents contribute to material change?

This study considers the degree to which Stretton's engagement with the plight of the abandoned child and with those on the edge of society militates against her status as an outsider; it suggests ways in which her preoccupation with the role and grievances of women - and the personal frustrations and rebelliousness inscribed in her writing - function to support the exposure of oppression and to transcend differences of situation. Tension and ambivalence complicate attitudes to freedom and restraint, dependence and autonomy, control and agency, the release or suppression of energies. My investigation draws attention to the manner in which Hester Stretton's writing reaffirms dominant ideologies; at the same time, it explores the potential of her narratives to interrogate or challenge the status quo and to present alternatives. I will demonstrate that textual contradictions and slippages betray the coexistence of essentially conservative patterns and progressive or resistant/creative currents, generating complexity and ambiguity. Stereotypes of age, gender and race are both reinscribed and subverted, traditional roles and patterns endorsed and problematised, with established boundaries frequently blurred or transgressed. The interplay between economic/material and moral forces, between social and spiritual solutions, forms a persistent thread. Within her work, popular modes of writing are both critiqued and exploited. Social structures and forms of authority are subjected to overt and oblique or unconscious critique, individual choices and actions, together with wider judgements, opened to interrogation. Stretton refers to the 'power of seeing with other people's eyes' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.35); the will to develop such a power manifests itself in, amongst other devices, the deployment of alternative perspectives within and across texts, with the effect of 'activat[ing] a traffic' (Myers and Knoepfelmacher (eds.), 1997, viii) not only between

different phases of life, but between different kinds of lives, contributing to the dialogic properties of Stretton's writing.⁹

A comprehensive approach which embraces the recovery of Stretton's full-length, clearly adult-oriented novels is important for several reasons. Arguably, these texts (which are not without literary merit) are significant in their own right, as a consequence of their engagement with prominent aspects of Victorian culture, and their expression of the experiences and concerns of the individual in relation to wider popular, social, political and philosophical ideas and anxieties. In common with a number of Stretton's short stories and articles, they confirm, elaborate and explicate currents, patterns and sentiments identifiable in her better-known texts and in her writing as a whole. They are important, as we shall see, for their articulation of wider cultural concepts - for their encapsulation of central ideas surrounding, for example, the figure of the child or social outcast and their expression of the complexities and ambiguities of the human condition.¹⁰

The late Mitzi Myers (1995, 3) speaks of the difficulty we face in envisaging earlier child and adult readers as 'inhabitants of one literary world, or at least of parallel reading worlds with more permeable boundaries than those we are accustomed to'. My research suggests the productiveness of an approach which encompasses a broad spectrum of texts, shedding light on their interrelationship, their overall engagement with the wider cultural context, and, ultimately, on the cumulative significance of Stretton's project. As discussion of actual/potential audiences will confirm, this study situates her writings within a continuum in which different kinds of text, from the three-volume novel to the short narrative or article, fruitfully intersect. Works refer both directly and obliquely to each other, with ideas and themes overlapping or transposed to a different context; their intertextuality with each other, and with wider literary and extra-literary forms, highlights the commonality of experiences and perceptions, the fragility of borders, the disparities between different perspectives.

The structure of my project reflects the intersection of ideas across categories, and the relationship between private and public arenas, between personal and textual preoccupations. The two chapters which constitute Part I anticipate the concerns of Part II, and form a backdrop to more detailed discussion of textual themes and motifs.

Chapter 1 establishes a biographical framework, focusing in particular on journal writings. Insights afforded by these and other available personal/biographical sources such as letters, campaign leaflets and interview material are discussed in the context of Stretton's personal experiences/attitudes and the overlapping sphere of her wider activities and reputation/career as a writer, with findings and impressions related to textual themes/currents. Whilst assumptions of a direct correspondence between life and work are problematic, an awareness of such difficulties facilitates an informed and potentially illuminating discussion of the intersections and contradictions and, importantly, the significant energies and tensions seemingly common to both private and public forms.¹¹

Chapter 2 focuses on the broad publishing context, examining converging/ competing motivations of writer, publishers and other agents/institutions within society, and the interplay between these and wider social, cultural and political agendas and attitudes. The permeability of boundaries and concomitant confusions/elisions in relation to age and class of reader emerge as significant. I investigate issues of audience, critical reception and wider contemporary responses to Stretton's work, whilst highlighting the problematical nature of definitive identification. This section embraces a discussion of implied/potential audiences and possible subject positions offered by texts. Examining narrative voice/perspective, generic hybridity and contemporary/archetypal relevance, I consider how diverse strategies, together with thematic preoccupations and unconscious effects, contribute to polyvocality and invite engagement at practical and psychological levels, rendering Hesba Stretton's work a rich field for critical exploration. Investigation into Stretton's relationships with the publishing establishment links transgression of boundaries in the professional area with challenges to established conventions in both personal and textual arenas.

Part II of the study, which looks back to, and draws upon, earlier chapters, focuses on textual, contextual and intertextual roles, representations and social relations. Images and representations are, of course, not neutral reflections of reality, but embody ideologies and assumptions which are implicated in the formation of individual and group subjectivity and identity, in Bakhtinian or Althusserian processes of ideological 'becoming'.¹² They circulate to influence/interact with lived experience; social relations are discursively produced and worked out within this framework. In all areas

of discussion, I locate representations in the context of the dominant cultural images/discourses which surround the figures/groups under scrutiny, drawing attention to intertextuality between various literary and non-literary forms of expression, and analysing Stretton's intervention in contemporary debates. Chapters 3 to 7 examine these areas in relation to the various outcast or marginalised figures, commencing with a focus on the child. It will, however, become clear that the overlapping and circular nature of the themes addressed make a variety of permutations of order possible. In view of the intersection of thematic concerns, this study expressly explores certain questions/material in more than one context, and from varying perspectives. For example, the importance of the mother figure is discussed from the point of view of the child, the woman, and in relation to wider processes of socialisation.

In Chapter 3, I examine ways in which concepts/ideologies of the child are shown to be class-inflected, and have been constructed/harnessed to fulfil varying cultural, political and psychological needs and purposes. This discussion prefaces an investigation into Stretton's representation of the child and its relationships - within the family and society - with particular reference to the experiences of the poor, orphaned or abandoned child, identifying class differences and cross-class convergences of interest. Questions of alienation, freedom and deprivation, issues of abuse, exploitation, agency, autonomy and boundary-crossing are central; challenges to dominant structures, engagement with alternative family patterns, and the potential of the child to act as interrogative and mediatory force are considered.

Chapter 4 develops earlier discussion of the sexualisation and commodification of the child, and presages the gender concerns of Chapter 5. It focuses on themes, nuances and subtexts which tap into society's wider preoccupation with sexuality, and the concomitant drive to contain such energies, particularly in the context of the young woman and of contemporary class anxieties in relation to prostitution. My analysis illustrates the transferability of images and suggests the enactment of sexual struggle as well as the residual expression of sexual currents.

Chapter 5 takes up issues of patriarchal power raised in connection with the child; I explore cultural/textual constructions and representations of women's roles and relationships in relation to the reinscription, exposure and subversion of ideologies of

gender, again highlighting ambivalence and identifying issues which are both class-specific and invite cross-class engagement. Representations of the mother and the implications of the maternal bond in terms of practical, emotional and psychological experiences of attachment/separation and exploitation are explored in the light of contemporary debates/discourses, and the effects of pre-Oedipal forces examined.

Chapter 6 focuses on textual and contextual discourses of outcast society, with an emphasis on images of abjection and the overlap of binary oppositions across cultural social, moral and spiritual spheres. It continues to examine the problems of speaking on behalf of others and individualising representations. Analysis of discourses of the city, of town and country, darkness and light, heaven and hell, good and evil, is related to the elision of metaphorical and material concerns; this is followed by an exploration of Stretton's portrayal of the criminal world and her interrogation of attitudes to deviance and delinquency. A study of representations of the Jew, the gypsy and the savage illustrates the complex, equivocal and interrelated nature of responses to these figures.

In Chapter 7, the focus shifts to Stretton's Russian-themed texts, which centre on the experiences of the persecuted Christian Stundist minority. Investigation into this area of her work evidences the intermingling of many of the concerns which underpin earlier discussion. I explore reasons for Stretton's collaboration with potentially revolutionary Russian exiles, examining her practical and textual intervention in the context of wider cultural sympathies and currents of progressive/socialist thought.

My study foregrounds the hybrid nature of Stretton's writings, and of the fields of concern with which they engage. Consequently, a hybrid theoretical approach, drawing on ideas generated by diverse overlapping critical discourses, is particularly appropriate. As my rationale suggests, projects which situate texts within their social/cultural context draw attention to the permeable boundaries between literature, history and culture, inviting the application of new historicist or cultural materialist perspectives which locate works within a network of other texts, contexts, events, ideas and experiences. Such emphases demand recourse to historical, cultural and literary studies; the process of historicisation is amplified by interdisciplinary approaches which illuminate the dynamic relationship between artistic, cultural, social, political and psychological spheres, bringing into focus the intertextual relationship between fictive and 'factual'

forms/events, the interplay between representation and experience and shedding light on intersections, tensions and contradictions.¹³

It is likewise fruitful to draw on a variety of contemporary sources, including literary, non-literary and visual texts. Materially-grounded studies of class and poverty furnish important contextual material. Critical works which focus in varying degrees on the multi-directional connections between representations, discourses and mythologies, and the construction or formation of histories, identities and lived experiences provide a valuable frame of reference, whether such works relate to child or woman, to outcast society in general or to particular figures or groups.¹⁴ Stretton's focus on authority/power, and the participation of her texts in networks of control and discipline, invite engagement with ideological concerns. The ideas of cultural theorist Michel Foucault (1979; 1981; 1987) concerning the operation/diffusion of power, the role of discourse (and the possibility of counter-discourses) are pertinent,¹⁵ with discussions of sexuality and discourses of the body offering productive insights.

As a consequence of Stretton's reputation as a children's writer, and her preoccupation with the child, this study engages with diverse perspectives afforded by the substantial body of children's literature criticism/childhood studies - a field which itself draws on and integrates multiple branches of theory. Mitzi Myers (1995, 2) proposes child-centred texts as 'ideal investigatory sites' for the application of diverse forms of theory, and, in particular, for the interrogation of issues of 'alterity' (Myers, 1999, 49); she emphasises the importance of engaging with the political and revisionary implications of such texts. The complex and ongoing debates about the constructedness of the figure of the child and the fluidity of notions of childhood, as well as discussions regarding the problems of approaching/defining children's literature are relevant to this investigation.¹⁶ In common with Myers, various critics have demonstrated the relationship between children's literature and feminist concerns, pointing to the harnessing of children's literature as a vehicle for subversion, as well as a medium for the inculcation of traditional norms and gender ideologies.¹⁷

Feminist perspectives are doubly pertinent because of Stretton's investment in the situation and perspective of the woman. In exploring/contextualising issues of womanhood and maternity, I refer to contemporary debate, and to modern gender

studies which employ historical sources and highlight the interaction of the material and the mythological, the imbrication of class and gender, the centrality of questions of sexuality, deviance and notions of the abject.¹⁸ Discussion of the child takes into account psychoanalytical perspectives which highlight unconscious drives and needs, and underline the interrelationship of the material and the psychological as well as the importance of the idea of the child in the development of the self. Similarly, areas of feminist study informed by psychoanalysis can usefully be brought to bear on explorations of maternity and the maternal bond, with the pre-Oedipal recognised as a possible site of unconscious engagement between writer and reader, and a locus of potential female resistance to the symbolic order.¹⁹ Critics such as E. Ann Kaplan (1992) fruitfully integrate psychological and socio-political approaches, and focus on the place of melodrama in these processes. The operation/harnessing of melodrama, from this and other perspectives, forms a thread which runs through my investigation, tracing the possible interplay between overlapping ideas of outcast society as drama/spectacle in terms of 'lived' and artistic/literary performance or account, and the role of melodrama in mobilising mass emotion and imparting a political message.

Just as critics have found it fruitful to apply feminist perspectives to children's literature - not least because of the conjunction of interests and shared marginality of the two groups - critics such as Perry Nodelman have highlighted the relevance of post-colonialist theories.²⁰ Such approaches draw attention to the inherent 'inferiority' of both child and colonial subject, their common status as object of the outsider's gaze and an inherently 'imperialist' project, and the problems of representation to which I have already referred. The colonialist implications of Stretton's project - in terms of its own involvement in agendas of education and socialisation, and its sustained illustration of the association and interplay between discourses of the child, the outcast and the savage (at home and abroad) - render such insights into parallel discourses of otherness doubly useful. As with thematic and contextual motifs and ideas, critical approaches overlap in multiple permutations, embracing such fields as deconstruction and postmodernism which problematise totalising discourses, and exposing common theoretical ground across the diverse concerns.

Implicit in the uncovering of a range of competing and conflicting voices and currents within/across Stretton's writing, and of the potential for multiple engagement and

interpretation, are, as suggested, Bakhtinian notions of the dialogic properties of texts, and related theories of intertextuality which take into account the 'complex relational dynamic' (Paul, 1998, 11) operating between writer, text, context(s) and reader.²¹ All the elements which writer and reader bring to the texts - cultural influences, experiences, knowledge and value-judgements - are implicated, at conscious and unconscious levels; they converge, coalesce and conflict, producing tensions and contradictions. Language, illustrations, ideas, patterns and motifs call attention to each other, generating diffuse echoes, associations and meanings which variously work to support or interrogate/subvert dominant ideologies. Writers/texts may apparently privilege one reading over another, yet simultaneously - intentionally or unintentionally - offer alternative voices, stories and positionalities. Readers, with their particular needs/priorities and ways of reading, are liable to make different connections and, at various levels, to engage with, question or resist particular aspects.

In addressing the problems of representing and reclaiming individual voices/experiences, it is important to raise the question of homogenisation and generalisation within my own project. Perry Nodelman (2000, 38) highlights the risk of unintentionally reinforcing assumptions which are intended to be deconstructed, through the use of generic terms such as 'the child'. My inclusion of monolithic terms such as 'childhood', 'the outcast'/'outcast society' and other 'labels' - as well as providing ease of reference - forms part of an interrogation of the construction of such terms/ideas rather than a confirmation of homogeneity. The foregrounding of links/common ground does not does not overlook differences; the fact, for example, that every adult has once been (and merges with) a child sets childhood apart from other forms of marginalisation. Furthermore, as Alan Richardson (1999, 31) suggests, the child's legitimate need for guidance and protection means that we cannot place children uncritically alongside other disenfranchised figures/groups.²² Although the structure of my study reflects division into categories, it will emerge that borders are fluid and classifications problematic, overlapping and susceptible to deconstruction, suggesting plurality, heterogeneity and hybridity, contradiction and confusion. I am concerned with both the manner in which oppositions are set up, and with evidence of the dismantling of rigid binaries/polarities.²³

With regard to the period under study, there is always a danger, as Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 10) points out, of assuming a 'specious unity'. Hesba Stretton's lifetime broadly overlaps with the reign of Queen Victoria; her writing spans the greater part of the second half of the nineteenth century. We cannot, of course, regard this as a homogeneous period; there is both change and continuity. Nonetheless, despite shifts in emphasis - which are reflected in Stretton's work - certain preoccupations, assumptions and ways of thinking about the outcast remain central. The intermittently intensified class anxieties and fears of unrest which characterised earlier decades - as, for example, in response to 1840s Chartism or the slump of the mid-1860s - continued to absorb commentators as poverty was 'rediscovered' in the final decades; responses now reflected heightened imperialist and eugenic concerns, increased awareness of collective/state responsibility and pressure for reform or even revolution.²⁴

Underlining the persistence of such anxieties, Francis Peek, in the Contemporary Review (1888b, 276), discusses the failure to relieve poverty during recurring depressions over three winters. He highlights concomitant demonstrations of lawlessness, deeming it unsurprising that 'preachers of anarchy find an attentive audience when they denounce modern government as tyranny, and the rulers of the state as oppressors of the poor' (1888a, 52).

Like Dickens and Gaskell before her, Stretton, from her earliest writings, displayed deep concern over the impact of poverty and the struggles of the disenfranchised, whether such deprivation arose from the cotton famine in Manchester in the early 1860s or conditions in the slums of London in the ensuing decades. Despite the 'social awakening' which marked the 1880s, and the focus on social/environmental factors such as health and housing, the gulf between rich and poor which Stretton emphasises throughout her narratives was perceived to deepen as the century progressed. Samuel Barnett, writing in 1886, cites statistical evidence that poverty in London was increasing both relatively and actually (687). He draws attention to the squalid dwellings of the poor (whose substance is more often at the pawnbrokers than in the home) and to ragged, ill-fed and joyless children deprived of fresh air and space to play - subjects which had absorbed commentators and writers since the early decades, and continue to dominate Stretton's fiction and factual articles till the century's end. Against this backdrop, the preoccupation with national wealth and fashionable luxury appeared 'but

cruel satire' (Barnett, 680). Stretton, likewise, was only too aware that, marching 'step for step with the ever-increasing luxury of the rich', could be found the 'gaunt degradation' of the poor (Cobwebs and Cables, 1881, Ch.29).

Society's preoccupation with the child also spans the period of Stretton's writing, with exploitation, abuse and exclusion/isolation ever more insistent concerns. The child continues to be both symbolically and materially central, with shifting priorities and cultural/educational agendas mirrored in Stretton's narratives and practical involvement. The right of the child to protection - by mid-century firmly extended beyond the middle-class setting - can be seen to progress, as urged by Benjamin Waugh (1888, 826), from its application in the factory setting to its implementation in the school, the theatre, the street, the home. Likewise, the 'woman question', established as a vital topic by the 1860s (Vicinus, 1980, ix), was, in all its nuances, the focus of attention throughout the rest of the century and beyond. Despite variations in emphasis, involving the convergence/divergence of strands of feminism, we can identify a persistent thread in terms of broad concerns and rhetoric. Entangled with these preoccupations, the appropriation and accommodation of scientific and evolutionary ideas - with their inherent challenge to religious and cultural authority, and implications for society's 'outsiders' - was in process over the course of the period under scrutiny.

Reading and responding to Stretton's texts today, we are inevitably influenced by our own perspective on the period. As U.C. Knoepfelmacher (1998, 430) observes, we cannot recover the Victorians 'as they saw themselves'. Distance enables us more easily to identify messages and patterns, but changes in perception may distort understanding, and mythologies/preconceptions or personal/ideological stances colour our analysis.²⁵ It is essential, as Valerie Sanders (1996, 204) emphasises, to respect the historical/ideological otherness of texts, and yet, at the same time, to be alert to the underlying complexities and open-endedness which generate wider meaning and, arguably, ongoing relevance.

A mid-twentieth-century profile, written as part of a series covering famous Shropshire personalities (No. 2, unsigned, n.d.), suggests that Hesba Stretton's texts are as 'incapable of surviving the transfer to another age as a fish is incapable of living out of water'. However, whilst these narratives are clearly a product of their times, they

incorporate elements which transcend those times and render the texts meaningful to a modern audience. As this study will demonstrate, Stretton's writing is, in some aspects, experimental, exhibiting, at times, a 'modern' self-consciousness and plurality of perspective. Not only does her work direct attention onto the structures, experiences, attitudes and ambivalence of the period, but many of its themes also have resonance for us today, providing, not least, a historical background to the development of modern cultural and gender ideologies, the formation of present-day ideas and attitudes. They have current salience as additions to the 'story' of the period, inviting engagement with the otherness of a different era. Also, as Rod McGillis (2000, 51) suggests, read by today's children alongside modern works of historical fiction, they can offer at least a 'singly mediated past', permitting the shaping of history with a certain degree of what McGillis terms 'authenticity and immediacy', or, more precisely, "authority" (51).

Importantly, Stretton's texts speak to fundamental needs, desires and insecurities which are played out in the various forms of marginalisation, alienation, family dysfunction and moral uncertainty evident in modern society. Relations of power - so crucial in Stretton's work - continue to underlie and influence experience in private and public spheres. Notwithstanding progress, gender inequalities and conflicts persist - with resentments about women's domestic exploitation or oppression, their exclusion from power in certain areas of public life, and the social marginalisation of maternity often expressed in terms similar to those voiced by Stretton's protagonists. Attitudes and childhood experiences across classes have undergone radical change, but have their roots in Romantically-influenced ideas about the child; they are still marked by material inequalities as well as emotional and cultural investment, with boundaries between adult and child simultaneously dismantled and emphasised. Whilst some children enjoy the benefits, and suffer the consequences, of increased protection, others, despite legislation, are variously abused and exploited within families and societies, their voices not heard or fully taken into account. The Wordsworthian 'getting and spending' which Stretton identifies (The Soul of Honour, Ch.10) - still dominates mindsets whilst many remain disenfranchised and exploited. We recognise that similar problems of deprivation, homelessness, crime and social unrest challenge us today; familiar arguments surround the selection of appropriate methods of tackling juvenile crime, with causal factors and responses still predominantly class-related. There remains a

reluctance to concede the ineffectiveness and negative consequences of prison so clearly identified by Stretton; programmes of rehabilitation and training continue to be inadequate or non-existent.

Constructions and perceptions of difference contribute to enduring mythologies, fuelling the misunderstandings and hatred which underlie many of the divisions/ conflicts between different groups and communities today; enmities persist or resurface between neighbours. Importantly, something akin to that which Foucault (1979, 199) describes as the 'binary branding and exile of the leper' operates in responses to those whom we perceive, and fear, as outsiders or outcasts - as different from (yet too much resembling) ourselves - and is apparent in the classifications which we perpetuate. The same fascination or romanticisation blends with this urge to distance, and renders our attitudes, in many instances, just as equivocal today. We are likely to recognise ourselves as well as others in the pages of Stretton's texts.

¹ The name of Hesba Stretton was adopted by Sarah Smith not long after she commenced her writing career, the first name was formed from the initials of her siblings and the surname taken from the Shropshire village where the family owned property.

² As will become clear, Stretton's themes and motifs overlap in clearly identifiable ways with those of writers such as Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Victor Hugo and others; they echo, and interact with, culturally significant concerns which surface across all media forms.

³ At the same time, as we shall see, the elements of 'otherness' now valorised in fantasy/fairy tales in fact make their presence felt in underlying motifs and currents in Stretton's writing.

⁴ See, for example, the important body of work by Mitzi Myers (notably in the field of writers such as Maria Edgeworth) which offers important ways of thinking about concepts/issues of childhood and about the work of women educators. The insights provided have moved forward the discussion and historicisation of works for and about children, and foregrounded the complexities of the position of the child as both symbol and social being, issues central to my thesis.

⁵ Laura Berry (1999, 110) in her study, The Child, The State, and The Victorian Novel, identifies in relation to fiction by writers such as the Brontes, a convergence, in notions of 'tyranny', between concepts of revolution, absolute power, violent control and political sovereignty, and relations/conflicts of power within the family or in respect of the individual 'sovereign' self. It can be argued that this concept of a conjunction/conflation of diverse forms of tyranny and expressions of power relations across public, private and psychic arenas can aptly be invoked in relation to the cumulative force of such associations within Stretton's life and overall project.

⁶ Having discovered that, in calling his new play, 'The Doctor's Dilemma', he had chosen a title already adopted by Stretton, George Bernard Shaw wrote to her in gracious terms to request permission to use this wording (8.10.1906). Stretton's book was still in print and selling in small numbers, but she confirmed (10.10.1906) that, subject to the approval of Hodder and Stoughton, she was happy for Shaw to use the title (correspondence held at Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center). Some early editions of the play carry an acknowledgement to Stretton.

⁷ The differing emphases of the term 'representation' - in the sense of both literary/cultural 'portrayal' and 'speaking on behalf of'/'pleading the cause of' (as suggested by Stretton in her preface to The Highway of Sorrow (1894), in relation to the cause of the Russian Stundist minority) - are relevant to this investigation.

⁸ See also Maria Nikolajeva (2002, 185) on the ethics of attempting to 'lend' (or, effectively, 'usurp') the voice of silenced minorities such as children, on the problems of adopting/communicating the subjectivity of such groups, and the conflict between educating/socialising and taking the part of the marginalised figure.

⁹ Myers and Knoepfelmacher (eds.) (1997), discussing the notion of 'cross-writing', assert their belief in a 'dialogic mix' of conflicting voices, embracing older and younger voices as well as past and present selves (vii-viii). Such interplay allows movement across boundaries between adult and child, and, as I will argue in this study, between other 'oppositional' classes and groupings.

¹⁰ For example, Hester Morley's Promise (1873) provides useful insights into the nature of childhood; from the early The Clives of Burcot (first published in 1867, and reissued early in the twentieth century as The Price of a Secret), Stretton's long novels highlight her preoccupation with patriarchal oppression, female containment and the inequities/complexities of gender relations; texts such as the late The Soul of Honour (1898) are notable for their reinforcement of images of alienation. The Doctor's Dilemma (1872) blends these concerns, and contains important confirmation, as we shall see, into the thinking behind particular narrative effects identifiable in her writing as a whole. In Cobwebs and Cables (1881), the concerns of a woman writer are foregrounded, and Half Brothers (1892) directs attention onto the discourses of savagery and civilisation which permeate Stretton's writings and the wider culture. Many of these longer works have middle-class protagonists (some of whom are border-crossers) at their centre, a fact which illustrates both differences and common experiences between classes. The emphasis on middle-class crime/fraud in the full-length works - and on middle-class perpetrators who become outcasts - points up the existence of criminal activity, albeit of a different kind, across classes, and undermines the pervasive idea that it is only the outcast classes which are synonymous with crime. Narratives such as the famous Alone in London (1869) find a literal echo in the chapter entitled 'Alone in London' in the longer Hester Morley's Promise (1873). In view of the body of unexplored material which the present study undertakes to recover, I have avoided lengthy 'plot-telling' in order to concentrate on the identification of

discourses, motifs and currents across the range of Stretton's work, exposing central themes and story-lines as part of this process.

¹¹ Mitzi Myers points to Dominick LaCapra's observation that 'an author's written and "lived" texts interact in ways far more subtle than cause-effect sequence, questioning as well as supplementing one another' (LaCapra (1982, 60-61 cited in Myers 1991, 118, note 25). In the same note, Myers also refers to Philippa Pearce's (1962, 76) recognition of the co-presence in children's books of both the fantasies and the materialities of the author's childhood, both elements being liable to intensification/modification for personal reasons - a useful point to bear in mind. My discussion of biographical perspectives and personal/public writings is also informed by Judy Simons's (1990) study of the diaries and journals of literary women, which provides valuable insights into the complexities of such undertakings.

¹² See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' extracted in A. Easthope and K. McGowan (eds.) (1992). See also Lynne Pearce (1994) Reading Dialogics. Pearce (65) discusses the way in which Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the role of language in the 'ideological becoming' of subjects anticipates Althusser's theory of interpellation, but differs from the latter in the degree of freedom, resistance and potential for renegotiation allowed to subjects. Michel Foucault (1979) suggests that 'the individual is carefully fabricated within [the social order], according to a whole technique of forces and bodies' (217). We can see that diverse social, cultural and literary practices, discourses and representations are involved in this process; within this web, literary texts interact in a creative as well as reflective relationship with wider mechanisms, the process of reading being implicated, as critics such as Kate Flint (1993, 40-41) have emphasised, in the ongoing formation of the subject, and intertwined with perceptions, responses and concrete experiences involving compliance/acquiescence and resistance. Underlining the complex interweaving of factors, Mitzi Myers (1999, 47) endorses the idea of 'situating the formation of subjectivity in history, in language, in story, in the lived realities of social existence'.

¹³ See, for example, Tony Watkins (1999) for an overview of new historicist/cultural approaches which integrate historical context, theoretical methodology, ideological perspectives and textual analysis, underlining the multi-directional influences which operate between literary discourses/practices, extra-literary cultural formations and concrete actions/experiences.

¹⁴ This study draws on archival sources, particularly in the area of publishing, on contemporary studies by social investigators such as Henry Mayhew, George Sims and Andrew Mearns, and on numerous nineteenth-century articles and texts. Useful modern accounts of the period include Gareth Stedman Jones's (1984) study of class relations, Outcast London, and Gertrude Himmelfarb's Poverty and Compassion (1991), which explores the moral imagination of the late Victorians. Hugh Cunningham's perceptive study, The Children of the Poor (1991), which focuses on representations of childhood, complements material provided, for example, by Anna Davin's Growing Up Poor (1996), which the author herself describes as emphasising 'experience', the two perspectives being ultimately intertwined and mutually dependent.

¹⁵ In pointing to the existence of networks/diffuse mechanisms of power and systems of control, Foucault's ideas also allow for the possibility of reverse discourses:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge, 1981, 100-1).

¹⁶ The essays collected in Peter Hunt (ed.) (1999) Understanding Children's Literature underline the relevance of employing and integrating diverse and overlapping branches of theory. I draw on the work of Hunt and numerous other critics in the field of children's literature, including Peter Hollindale, John Stephens, Mitzi Myers, Jacqueline Rose, Carolyn Steedman, Kimberley Reynolds, Karin Lesnik-Oberstein and others. The question of the complex interimbrication/circulation of notions of childhood, innocence and sexuality is recognised by critics such as Rose (1994, 99) and explored, with varying emphases, by writers such as James Kincaid (1992) and Anne Higonnet (1998).

¹⁷ See, for example, Julia Briggs (1989); Lissa Paul (1987; 1998; 1999); see also studies such as Reynolds and Humble (1993) and Nelson and Vallone (eds.) (1994) which focus on representations of, and influences on, Victorian girlhood.

¹⁸ This study employs socio-historical accounts such as Ellen Ross's Motherhood and Toil (1993) in conjunction with studies of class, gender and culture such as those by Lynda Nead (1988), Judith

Walkowitz (1992) and Leonore Davidoff (1995). Discussions of female sexuality overlap with general accounts by Michel Foucault (1981 and 1987), Michael Mason (1994), and, in the context of the relationship between discourses of religion and sexuality, John Maynard (1993).

¹⁹ See, for example, the work of Nancy Chodorow (1978), and the ideas of feminist psychoanalytical theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

²⁰ See, in particular, Perry Nodelman (1992). Drawing on the work of Edward Said, Nodelman has called attention to the parallels between Said's descriptions of Orientalism and our representations of childhood; he draws upon the work of Foucault, Derrida and Lacan on discourses of power, difference and the unconscious. Concluding that 'all discourse is in fact a discourse of the other' (1992, 34), Nodelman underlines the role of discourses of the other in the process of self-definition (32) and observes that our 'eternal desire and failure to understand the other confirms ... its paradoxical attractiveness and danger to us' (31). He quotes Said's assertion that 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different" (Said, 1978, 40, quoted in Nodelman, 1992, 32), a view which is pertinent to the interrelated representations of otherness which underpin my project.

²¹ Lissa Paul (1998), in her discussion of the possibility of 'reading otherways', again demonstrates the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's 'dialogic principle' and notions of 'polyphony', and of related ideas of intertextuality which encompass, amongst other elements, the affective response of the reader (see also Flint, 1993, 40). The fields of new historicism and cultural studies draw productively on theories of dialogism; such ideas inform the work of critic Mitzi Myers and others. For an overview of the development and extension of ideas of intertextuality, see Christine Wilkie (1999). See also Bakhtin (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination*; Lynne Pearce (1994). Bakhtin's theories of the 'grotesque body' also feed into ideas of transgression and abjection as discussed in relation to such aspects as the representation of the 'outcast' as material waste. See also related ideas in Julia Kristeva (1982) *Powers of Horror* and P.K. Gilbert (1997) *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*.

²² Richardson points out that the child is vulnerable to exploitation and in need of protection in a way that other disadvantaged figures are not. Stretton herself, in pressing for an agency directed specifically at providing for the needs of children, suggests that 'women can defend themselves, or at least know how and where to seek redress' (Letter to *The Times*, 30.6.1884). The child is clearly a special case; at the same time, I would argue - and other aspects of Stretton's project tend to support this view - that we should not underestimate the degree of protection needed by other disenfranchised and exploited groups.

²³ Myers (1999) refers to the problems of being drawn into the terms of Orientalism: oppositional stances and negativity may be perpetuated, the complexities underestimated and the possibility of counternarratives obscured (50-52). She suggests a 'transvalu[ation]' of the 'customary denigration of "native" as child, and suggests the importance of 'tak[ing] the feminized juvenile seriously as a syncretic locus of revisionary community' (51). Myers also advocates a critical approach which moves beyond the oppositions of the 'juridical mode of indictment or exculpation' (49), producing a more complex contextualised analysis - a suggestion which chimes with the ethos of the present study, which eschews rigid evaluation in favour of a more complex 'uncovering'.

²⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones (1984) identifies the continuing existence, and perceived corrupting influence, of the 'residuum' - in its varied characterisations - as a source of persistent and growing anxiety throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, amidst shifting social attitudes/responses and an overall confidence in the amelioration of society.

²⁵ For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 8) points out that the language of morality in relation to social concerns is today more often associated with conservatism, whereas in Victorian England it was also the discourse of radicals, liberals and others. From today's perspective we might regard the aims of the Temperance Movement as restrictive; nonetheless the work of activists - particularly women - in this sphere formed a springboard for wider movements of reform.

PART I:

***PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIVES;
WRITING AND READING WORLDS***

CHAPTER 1

PERSONAL WRITINGS, PUBLISHED TEXTS, BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

My study undertakes to explore and locate Hesba Stretton's writings in their social and cultural context; clearly, the life of the author must constitute part of, and be subject to, that context. I will concern myself here with the intersection of aspects of Hesba Stretton's life and writings, focusing on intertextuality between experiences, interests and attitudes expressed/represented in diverse forms of writing and discourse by Stretton. I am not seeking to present a comprehensive biographical study;¹ findings will be located within the framework of the major themes/cultural areas which underpin my thesis. Material will be discussed in the context of the debates and overlapping discourses identified as major preoccupations/constituents within Stretton's work, not least the areas of gender, motherhood, social/power relations and themes of exclusion and otherness. As a consequence, my approach will be thematic and circular, rather than rigidly chronological; it will, however, reflect changes and developments.

In her study of women's journal writing, Judy Simons (1990) identifies diaries, private writings and published texts as 'products of the same mind' (68), part of a 'single literary entity' (16).² Examination of the relationship between the various genres may reveal apparently conflicting viewpoints; at the same time, as Simons observes (202), similarities serve to illuminate the overlapping nature of the forms. In this section, I will draw on Stretton's log books, campaigning material and correspondence in the public domain, and on diverse interviews and articles, in order to foreground common threads/areas of convergence. I will also expose antagonisms/dissonance, identifying competing forces and tensions within and between the various sources, within and between 'life' and 'work' (or, more properly, within the continuum which is life and work), and, arguably, between self and other. Just as this chapter will refer forward to textual/contextual matters discussed in later sections, all subsequent chapters will refer back to biographical/cultural issues under scrutiny here, underlining their

interdependence, and the extent to which 'life' (or versions of life) and text may appear to illuminate or, in fact, complicate each other.

1.1 Education and imagination

Born in 1832, in Wellington, Shropshire, Sarah (or Hesba Stretton, as she was to become) was one of the five surviving children of Benjamin and Ann Smith. She grew up in Wellington with her older sisters, Hannah and Elizabeth, younger sister Annie, and her brother, Benjamin. It is known that Stretton attended Old Hall School in Wellington, but beyond this, little information is available regarding her childhood or the preoccupations of her schooldays.³

In order to shed light on Stretton's early years, it is useful to turn to material gathered, in fact, in the latter part of her life. An interview for Sunday Hours ('A Talk with Hesba Stretton', 1896)⁴ contains ostensibly direct transcriptions of Stretton's responses to questions regarding her girlhood. Whilst subject to time-/experience-mediated recall, and perhaps to a certain reserve on the part of the, by then, somewhat legendary Hesba Stretton,⁵ these responses provide an insight into a range of influences. Asked about the nature of her schooling, Stretton speaks of the irregularity, due to delicate health, of her formal schooling, but stresses the extent of her exposure to books. As the offspring of a bookseller,⁶ who was 'by no means a good man of business', but a 'real bookworm, knowing the inside of his books as well as the outside', Stretton and her siblings had, from their earliest days, access to the library and to books of all kinds. They were also permitted, if quiet, to stay and listen as they pleased in the room behind the shop, where 'numberless discussions were carried on, embracing every possible religious and political question', and in which 'all the intellectual people of the neighbourhood' took part (164).⁷ Stretton's writings reflect the range and depth of such influences, showing her to be - unlike the protagonist of Half Brothers (1892), whose 'literary education had consisted in the reading of third-rate novels' (Ch.2) - widely read and erudite. Her work frequently contains direct or indirect allusions to, or quotations from, literary and poetic texts;⁸ diary entries record both private and social reading of works by popular contemporary authors, including Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and George Eliot.⁹ They also reveal Stretton's interest in the life/writings of figures such as Victor Hugo, and testify to her engagement with the work of numerous prominent religious speakers/writers and

reformers, as well as with the activities of radical Russian émigrés.¹⁰ Major social, religious and political ideas and debates are central to her themes; interestingly, her great-nephew Captain Webb describes his childhood memory of her as ‘more of a Mind, than a Person’ (Webb, 1964, 16). In the Sunday Hours interview, Stretton describes education as ‘the calling out of all our faculties, especially of reason and sympathy, rather than the accumulating of a mass of information’ (165). The concept of education, and also of language, as both a civilising and an emancipatory force surfaces throughout her texts, which also foreground links between language, social expression and ‘social being’, and thus between language, class and power (David Lloyd’s Last Will, 1869, Vol.2, Ch.22; Half Brothers, Ch.51).

According to Stretton’s interview responses, books provided - literally - the building materials for early construction play, and later afforded food for mind and imagination; Stretton recalls ‘sitting for hours on the floor wrapt up in some fascinating narrative’. Imaginative faculties were given further rein during visits to a ‘primitive farmhouse’. Here, the children played among heaps of slag remaining from former lime or coalpits, which transformed the meadow into a landscape of hills and valleys, where the children had ‘our Mont Blanc, and our Atlantic Ocean’. Stretton speaks of ‘distant countries which we scarcely dared to explore alone’, recalling a ‘delicious sense of peril about venturing too far from the house’ and a belief in fairies, for whom the children built grottoes (165).

A childish openness to various facets of the supernatural assumes greater significance in relation to Stretton’s writing, and to her later ambivalence towards superstitious elements. In the interview Stretton continues:

In the winter there was the great barn ... where we played or talked among the straw, in semi-darkness, which made the corners look mysterious. At night we sat sometimes in the large old-fashioned kitchen, lit only by firelight, with the farm-servants sitting in an outer circle, and the talk was chiefly of ghosts, or of accidents in the coalpits not far away, and of the warnings that came beforehand, the winding-sheets in the candles, the ticking of the death-watch, the strange tappings at windows and doors, the melancholy howling of dogs, and all the other superstitions of that day. We were hedged in by spiritual beings, both good and evil. There was a certain amount of fearful pleasure in the thought that we might at any moment see or hear one (165).

As an evangelical Christian, the existence of such opposing spiritual forces was to be an underlying theme in Stretton's work - involving resistance and struggle. At the same time, her writing periodically evinces a fascination with the uncanny or supernatural, perhaps prefigured in these childhood experiences, and apparently in tension with an evangelical stance. (In fact, Stretton's work emphasises the proximity between religion and superstition, suggesting that the two are often enmeshed.) As M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 117) agrees, the 1860 log book allusion (somewhat playful) to the practice of placing 'dreamers' under one's head at night, for purposes of prognostication through dreams, would certainly have been frowned upon in evangelical circles. A journalist for The Young Woman in 1894,¹¹ unsure of her subject's reaction to the topics of seances and crystal-gazing, found Stretton quite open to such discussion. On diverse occasions, locations possessing supernatural associations feature in her narratives. The mysterious 'tapping' of a child, late at night, in the early story 'Felicia Crompton' (All The Year Round, 10.1.1863) recalls the childhood farmhouse experiences, and, perhaps, resonates with the sinister window-tapping in Brontë's Wuthering Heights (1847).

In her Russian-themed texts, Stretton decries the superstitions of the peasantry whilst simultaneously, in a manner which appears to draw on these underlying imaginative currents, summoning up the sense of darkness and menace attached to places shunned for their connections with evil deeds. The Lord's Pursebearers (1883) presents the reader with the grotesque spectacle of black and white dolls which have been painstakingly manufactured as effigies of hanged women, and in David Lloyd's Last Will, Stretton recreates the atmosphere of her childhood imaginings in the gothic settings which mark Mr. Lloyd's decease. The ambivalence embodied in attitudes towards superstition/the supernatural is concisely articulated in Michel Lorio's Cross (1876). Here, a child is attracted to the village outcast, a man ostracised for perceived religious heresy and labelled 'le diable': 'there was a mingling of superstitious feeling in her affection for Michel - a half dread that gave their secret meetings a greater charm to the daring spirit of the child'. Such a sentiment underlies other narrative situations, underlining a wider ambiguity of response, embodying the fear of, and fascination with, the unknown or 'other', which permeates Stretton's work and all aspects of its cultural context, as I shall establish.¹² Moreover, the writer of the Seed Time and Harvest Memoir (1911), alluding to Stretton's childhood play and to influences on her

development, comments that ‘all the while romance and imagination were being controlled’. This identification of religion and upbringing as restraining forces, although apparently speculative, appropriately encapsulates the tensions inherent in the conflicting agendas applicable to Stretton’s career as a writer.

1.2 The child and the maternal

In evoking her childhood for the Sunday Hours interviewer, Stretton testifies to the influence of her mother, who died before Stretton was ten years old. I would argue that we should not underestimate the sustained significance of this loss, and consequently its implications, both at a conscious and unconscious level, for her work. The effects are apparent in her writings, sometimes manifesting themselves in indirect or ambivalent forms. Clearly, it is possible to recognise an affinity between Stretton and the child Annie of The Children of Cloverley (1865), who fears she is ‘almost forgetting my mother’s face’ (Ch.2), or the nine-year old protagonist Hester Morley, who nestles down into her dead mother’s chair ‘as she might have nestled into her mother’s lap’, and owns, ‘Sometimes I think I feel her kissing me very softly’ (Hester Morley’s Promise, 1873, Ch.3). Stretton’s own childlessness must also be borne in mind; it may be significant that it was a dream of ‘two babies’ which apparently resulted from the above-mentioned ‘dreamer’ experiment (Log Book: 1.1.1861). Stretton’s interest in, and compassion for, children, and her awareness of what it is to be motherless or abandoned - whether in the case of the street waif or the middle-class protagonist - are prominent strands in her texts and practical campaigning, as I shall demonstrate. Similarly, the loss of, or fear of losing, a child is an insistent motif. These concerns will be located throughout my study within the context of contemporary discourses of the orphan, the mother-child relationship, and the prevalence of the ‘motherless’ as a trope in wider literature. Beyond this, as I will discuss in subsequent sections, her writing evinces currents of maternal longing, expressing a yearning for symbiotic reunion or pre-Oedipal fusion, which offers engagement both on the surface and below the level of the text. A preoccupation with the role of the stepmother also emerges in the narratives, surfacing in the observation that stepmothers are apt to be ‘sharper in speech and a trifle less tender in manner’ than natural mothers (David Lloyd’s Last Will, Vol.2, Ch.16), and in the anticipatory dread experienced by motherless Hester (Hester Morley’s Promise), whose education in fairy stories has engendered an archetypal fear of the

figure. I will discuss further the recurring motif of the stepmother (often represented by Stretton as scheming, easily angered, capricious or abusive), which perhaps derives from early personal fears - heightened by traditional cultural mythology - of the intrusion of such a figure.¹³

Stretton cites her mother as the formative influence on her early religious understanding and on the development of her spiritual awareness and sympathy for humanity.¹⁴ Her texts frequently highlight the importance of the mother as spiritual/moral guide, her own early experience perhaps giving added weight to dominant cultural notions of the mother's foundational role in this sphere. Henry Mayhew, discussing street-sellers' children, asserts that religious feelings are principally formed for them by mothers; without such direction, 'they have no religion' (Mayhew 1861-2/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 176), a view which both underpins Stretton's textual treatment of the mother figure, and yet is complicated by the alternatives her stories offer.

Despite a personal distaste for domesticity, Stretton speaks with admiration of her mother's capabilities in this area. Her ambivalence points up wider antagonisms between culturally-esteemed or personally-valued gender conventions/attributes, and individual inclinations. In practice, as in attitudes conveyed by diary entries, Stretton eschewed for herself, and decried/affectionately mocked in others, the preoccupations of the conventional domestic role. At the same time, the importance of the 'home-maker' is a persistent theme in her texts. Her scorn is also apparently at variance with comments made in later life in her article, 'Ragged School Union Conferences' (The Sunday at Home, April, 1883); such observations, significantly, expose differences of perception/expectation in respect of class, and point to social and imperialist eugenic concerns. In advocating the conversion of ragged schools into labour schools, Stretton suggests that 'a girl who knew how to sew and knit and wash, who could use a broom skilfully and scrub a floor well, would be more ready for service either at home or in the colonies' (268). Despite her championing of independence and persistent outrage at domestic enslavement, she denounces, in correspondence relating to child-protection, the 'growing love of liberty developing in the girls of the lower classes, which gives them a distaste for domestic service with its restraining and refining influences' (Letter to The Times, 8.1.1884). As I will establish, these elements of contradiction, involving

freedom and restraint, emerge throughout Stretton's work to complicate surface arguments.

1.3 Writing selves

Beyond these reminiscences about childhood, education and upbringing, first-hand testimony about Stretton's early life is limited. For a more extensive insight into aspects of her work, family and wider social interaction during middle and later years as recorded by Stretton, I will turn to her log books and other sources, at the same time foregrounding their intersection with her wider writings. Notebooks/log books are available for the period between 1858-71 and for part of 1875, and these will form the basis of much of my discussion in this section. Frustratingly, although notes on Stretton's life compiled in 1964 by her great-nephew, Captain Webb, indicate that additional diaries existed for the years between 1884-96, I have not been able to locate these (nor, it would seem, have other researchers, whose quotations from later periods are clearly confined to extracts selected by Webb).¹⁵ It should be acknowledged that an account which must necessarily depend to a greater extent on the earlier diaries risks being unevenly balanced; I will, however, draw on wider material in order to illuminate the later period.

Judy Simons (1990, 14 and 202) discusses the potential value of journals as a source of information regarding the processes, conditions and problems of production. Stretton's logs/diaries¹⁶ commence when the writer - still generally known by her birth-name of Sara Smith - was in her late twenties,¹⁷ and embarking on her first pieces of journalism.¹⁸ From the earliest days, Stretton's habit of referring to her books and articles by the name of their protagonists (eponymous or otherwise), suggests a sense of proprietorial affection: for example, 'Alice Gilbert came home from her seventh journey' (Log Book: 29.8.1860); 'Rhoda launched into London' (13.7.1861).¹⁹ The concomitant notion of the texts as journeying, homeless - indeed waif-like - parallels not only certain subject matter, but also Stretton's own periodic sense of being nomadic and unsettled as she struggled to find satisfactory lodgings. The diaries cover the period of her growing popularity and acclaim, but overall disclose limited information about the process of writing or Stretton's feelings about it. Indeed, even towards the end of her career, and in line with the somewhat inaccessible persona she conspired to present,

she seemingly exhibited a reluctance to talk about her writing. Journalist Hulda Friederichs (1894) found it difficult to obtain information, seeing clearly that Miss Hesba Stretton 'does not care to talk about her work' (330). She did, however, glean that Stretton, who confessed to being a rapid but careful writer, rewrote Hester Morley's Promise three times before settling upon a version which was to her satisfaction (331). Asked whether she adhered to a special method of writing, Stretton commented that she did not work out the 'plot' before beginning a story, often finding that her characters 'do things which I should never have thought they would do at the outset' (332).²⁰

Log book entries include occasional useful references to milestones, such as 'Great progress in the big book' (Log Book: (4.12.1860), 'second child's story finished' (9/10.2.1864), or 'begin my third novel' (29.1.1867),²¹ and sometimes note the reading of her texts at social gatherings. According to comments by her niece Hesba D. Webb, appended to the 1911 Sunday at Home Memoir, Stretton, during her 'most strenuous years of work', breakfasted in bed and then took a solitary walk before devoting the time between 10.a.m. and 1 p.m. to her writing; she maintained that this was sufficient, provided that she was guarded from external distractions (124). A letter by Stretton to Mrs. Priestley (2.10.1869) reveals that she did no writing during an 'unsettled' time between Easter and October 1869, due to 'wandering about from place to place' while sister Lizzie was without work. Webb's commentary refers to a period, following (sister) Hannah's death in 1886, during which Stretton felt unable to write, although several books were published around this time. Early diary entries testify to a sense of jealousy/rivalry in Stretton's response to the criticism and successes of peers, and reveal the susceptibility of the writer's moods to the fortunes of the profession, with 'an author like a barometer' (Log Book: 7.7.1861).²² Importantly, as Stretton scholars have noted, the log books provide considerable insight, for certain periods, into Stretton's relationship/dealings with publishers, a subject which I will discuss further in Chapter 2, in the context of the publishing environment.

It is important, in examining the material contained in the log books, to foreground certain considerations concerning the status and execution of journal-writing, its implications in terms of autobiography and intertextuality, and its particular relevance to women writers as a form of self-expression. Any exploration of diary material also poses questions regarding purpose and audience.²³ Judy Simons (1990) discusses the

contradictions embodied in the act of, and motivation for, diary-writing - complexities which problematise its status as a 'private literary construct' (2). The writing of a journal implies an audience, even if the writer/reader is actually the same person, and must therefore be regarded as a self-conscious literary activity. As with other forms of autobiography, questions of selectivity, bias and distortion must enter, to some degree, into an acceptance of its reliability as an undisputed record of facts and feelings, and yet at the same time, truths may be revealed unconsciously and unwittingly. The commencement of the diaries at the outset of Stretton's career as a published writer may suggest an awareness of the link between public and private forms of writing in terms of a more enduring record, although the mode of writing does not appear self-consciously literary. The first notebook is a lean document which simply records the outcomes of submissions of stories and articles to publishers of journals. In subsequent log books, the diary expands to become a fuller record of aspects of her life, ostensibly based on a daily format, although periods are elided or missed.²⁴ Questions of intent are not broached, but in early May 1867, Stretton self-consciously confesses, without explanation: 'I am ashamed of the Log Book' (n.d.). Such an assertion underlines the ambiguous character of diary-writing in terms of readership, although Stretton's journal initially represents a joint enterprise with her sister, thus implying an audience of at least one other person. Significantly, this entry coincides with her heightened acclaim as a children's writer, and - perhaps more importantly from the point of view of her aspirations as a novelist and a renewed sense of the diaries as possible objects of interest - with the publication/widespread reviews (some very flattering, others less so) of her first full-length novels.

1.4 Sisterhood and collective endeavour; self-expression and subversion

Diary-writing, as Simons (1990, 4) discusses, is often a collective activity, and in the case of Hesba Stretton's log books, the shared endeavour reflects the symbiotic relationship between Hesba/Sara(h)²⁵ and her sister Lizzie. The record is written initially in the third person, with some early entries in Lizzie's hand, and is concerned chiefly with family affairs and activities. The intention is announced, on their departure to Manchester in 1863, to 'record chiefly the events in the lives of Lizzie and Sara, with such notices of home as will be gathered from Hannah's letters' (Log Book: 13.10.1863). Entries thereafter are in Hesba Stretton's hand only. Contrary to M.

Nancy Cutt's assertion of an exclusively third-person style (1979, 119), Stretton intermittently resorts to a first-person narrative as the log books progress, perhaps reflecting a developing sense of self as the diary shadows her increasingly successful literary career and material independence. Despite the widening sphere of Stretton's association and influence, the close bond between the two sisters - perhaps affording a substitute maternal relation - was maintained throughout their lives. They shared dwellings, in a variety of locations; Stretton spent time writing while her sister worked as a governess²⁶ and, in the words of Captain Webb, 'bore the domestic burden so grandly' (Webb, 1964, 4). Although the sisters did spend time apart in the course of work and travel, Sara, during an absence by Lizzie, declared herself 'left a widow' (Log Book: 19.12.1863) - a remark at once playful and significant.²⁷

As Judy Simons (1990) demonstrates, diary writing presents a practical record of events and activities, including the mundane and the domestic (in itself revealing). In addition, it may afford, particularly for women, a means of expressing personal identity and of releasing emotions, responses, opinions and grievances constrained in other situations by the norms. Like the contents of many diaries, Stretton's log book entries are terse, fragmented, sometimes enigmatic or contradictory. They chart, or express responses to day-to-day experiences and frustrations, frequently appearing to reflect casual or surface reactions, minor irritations or domestic grievances, rather than serious introspection. Exposing Stretton's impatience with the monotony of routine activities, they nonetheless demonstrate a facility for retrieving the more significant elements from relatively uninspiring encounters. Social outings and gatherings are transformed into a kind of sport in order to enliven mundane elements, and reported in a tone of pleasurable gossip blended with sardonic or disdainful commentary. Certainly, Stretton did not suffer fools gladly - she could be irritable and outspoken, abrasive and provocative;²⁸ however, the diaries reveal a more playful and ironic outlook than the mythologies surrounding her might suggest. They nonetheless witness her determination to battle with the potentially overwhelming effects of what she repeatedly describes as 'profound stagnation' or 'monotony in the ark'. She made every effort to keep herself informed regarding, and involve herself with, contemporary debates and pressing social issues. Court proceedings and their outcomes held a particular fascination (as did the barristers), and diary entries record regular visits to the Jail and

Assize Courts (experiences on which she was to draw in her writing), as well as attendance at public lectures, museums and galleries.²⁹ Stretton is often forthright in her opinions on significant matters, although, as in her texts, there is evidence in the log books of changing/evolving attitudes. She emerges as independent-minded and often unconventional in her approach to issues and business dealings; in a number of respects, her views and actions suggest, as Suzanne Rickard (1996) has argued, an incipient feminism.

At the same time, her diary writing exhibits, as do her novels and stories, ambivalence and contradiction resulting from the interplay/mismatch between deeply embedded cultural norms and wider countercurrents, between ideals and natural proclivities, self and self-image. It is possible to trace both continuity and disjunction within and between Stretton's diaries and published works. Underlying motifs suggest that in certain areas, particularly in respect of issues such as gender relations, the fictional narratives offer wider possibilities than the acknowledged autobiographical form of the diaries. The cloak of fictional character perhaps facilitates extended reflection and self-examination, as well as self-expression/self-inscription.³⁰ It is inviting, and rendered plausible by the material - at least to consider, if not to draw conclusions from, the suggested connections, whether conscious or unconscious, between Stretton's own views and those expressed in the texts. In respect of the latter part of Stretton's life, we have only Webb's commentary/limited diary extracts. However, throughout the course of her writing, reflecting what seems to be an irresistible urge to harness (or construct) thematic opportunities to express personal opinions/frustrations, the voice of Hesba Stretton - engaging with wider discontents - appears to ring deliberately and unashamedly in the mouths of characters/narrator, as my study will demonstrate. Nonetheless, she also confounds the reader with contradictory stances, often subverting what appears to be the authorial or narratorial position and thus frustrating identification and foregrounding complexity. In the diaries, the ironic tone teases, creating an elusive identity.

1.5 Religion, recreation and rebellion

Diaries testify to the centrality of religion in Stretton's world; as for a large section of nineteenth-century society, it formed the basis of social life and recreation. The

interweaving of the trivialities and complexities of life, the interdependence of the mundane, the social and the spiritual which characterises both diaries and published texts perhaps explains her relevance/appeal in terms of the personal, and contributes to the intersection of her work with prominent moral and social debates. Broadly evangelical in nature, but eschewing narrow dogmatism,³¹ her belief in an individual relationship with God and in a gospel of equality influences Stretton's practical activities as well as her social and feminist outlook. Distrust/criticism of the established church and organised religion manifests itself in a simplified - but not simplistic - religious code which admits moral complexity and permits, in her writing, currents of openness and a reluctance to judge. A considerable empathy with positions of doubt and uncertainty - spiritual and moral - vies with the expression of more conventional religious/moral assumptions. Often forthright in her own views, she was at the same time suspicious of inflexibility or exclusivity, plainly condemning the fact that 'Mrs. Manning thinks all religious talk different to her own dangerous' (Log Book: 13.12.1868.), and, particularly as her career progressed, adopting a reconciliatory stance. In fictional narratives, this is translated into an ability to represent the misperceptions inherent in divergent stances to interrogative/mediating effect, as I will demonstrate.³²

M. Nancy Cutt (1979) observes that the tone of Stretton's novels suggests that 'her religious convictions centred around rebellion against authority' (123). I would argue that the tendency towards anti-authoritarianism, although in tension with conservatism, permeates all facets of her writing and views. Such currents of rebellion will emerge as central to my thesis, extending, for example, from her strident views concerning patriarchal or Church authority, to her unorthodox dealings with publishers, and to her apparent support for certain forms of anarchy and republicanism. An early log book entry reveals the stirring of 'republican sentiments' in response to the 'unbounded reverence' with which an acquaintance 'expatiated' about the aristocracy (Log Book: 22.7.1861); Stretton's profession of herself, in a letter to Mrs. Pattison (written in about 1886),³³ as 'thoroughly a Radical, even a Republican' confirms the enduring nature of such sentiments.

Endorsement of the conservatism associated with certain religious viewpoints is both suggested in Stretton's diary comments and undermined, partly as a consequence of the

terseness of entries, which renders observations cryptic and the tone ambiguous. For example, M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 124), perhaps justifiably, reads disapproval in the remark: 'found pupils dancing in the classroom' (Log Book: 20.4.1864). Nonetheless, given the playful spirit in which the social scene is depicted, this might be one of many possible instances of a statement constituting a mocking repetition of responses by others, as suggested in relation to implied *outside* warnings about frequenting the theatre or the undesirability of a male acquaintance preaching to young women (29.8.1860). Hesba Stretton perhaps shared the view expressed by one of her protagonists, that religion can be too 'triste', too 'solemn' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.24).

As Cutt suggests, apparent scepticism of Revivalist tendencies can be identified; the 'secret of these meetings' (Log Book: 2.10.1861) with their 'storming' and 'ranting' preachers did initially elude the sisters. They (or others) attributed the appeal of such gatherings - the success of which clearly annoyed the regular preachers - to the masses' love of 'coarseness'. However, ensuing comments over a period of some months appear contradictory, with ambiguous effect; they suggest a greater openness, or at least curiosity, than Cutt allows, although professional interest may have played a part.³⁴ Stretton and her sisters continued to attend, and to display a certain fascination - sometimes going to great lengths to view the proceedings and braving the 'disgraceful conduct', 'fighting' and 'bad language' of the crowd. An entry shows Sara getting used to 'the scene'; another describes it as 'powerful' (20.1.1862), while other comments indicate disapproval of 'humbugs' who condemned the revival as evil or misguided. The sisters were evidently perceived by some to be favourably inclined; once again, however, there may have been an element of playfulness in impressions conveyed. Certain narrative material points to a familiarity with, and deliberations over, religious 'experiences' associated with conversion or sanctification, which seem at times very personal, although the short-lived nature of such 'fervid' encounters is suggested in the late text, The Soul of Honour (1898, Ch.15). Examples of complete spiritual immersion represent alternately a positive affirmation of its all-consuming nature, and a condemnation of extreme other-worldliness, with moderation perhaps advocated, as in David Lloyd's Last Will. Generally, the balance between complete dependence on God's provision and an absence of action on the part of the individual or society is

explored, presenting a pragmatic and politically aware challenge to unthinking religious platitudes, as my examination of textual roles will confirm.³⁵

Captain Webb may have found, whilst staying with his great-aunt during her later years, that 'there was nothing of frivolity, nor of sophistication about her' (Webb, 1964, 3), but the log books testify to a much lighter, less conformist, spirit in the younger Hesba Stretton. The legend - perpetuated by family and commentators, and reiterated for decades in biographical entries - constructs a quiet and decorous personage, who eschewed all forms of entertainment and self-gratification. By contrast, the log books periodically evidence her enjoyment of clothes and leisure pursuits, referring to the purchase of/desire for items of attire. In an early entry, Stretton playfully expresses a determination to 'fix her affections' on an individual who can amply provide her with clothes; she records shopping for a 'scarlet and black morning dress' and, later, 'gorgeous silk' one. Whilst in Switzerland, in 1875, she alludes to the purchase of several items of jewellery. Moreover, textual references to grave or 'staid sensible domestic home-keeping English matrons ... with no perceptible tinge of Bohemianism' ('Aboard an Emigrant Ship', *All The Year Round*, 12.4.1862, 112) convey a less than sympathetic message. In her journal, Stretton records two visits to the theatre³⁶ (in one case, noting her enjoyment and emergence 'none the worse' for the experience), as well as attendance at concerts, flower shows, informal entertainments, a performance of the Christy Minstrels, and excursions to such attractions as The Crystal Palace.

Admittedly, Hesba Stretton did observe on occasion that she did not care for society, for which she was convinced they were 'not fitted' (Log Book: 11.3.1864; 23.4.1867); the following year she declared large and fashionable parties 'against the grain'. Nevertheless, it is clear that, despite her professions of melancholy and boredom, and her alleged seriousness, laughter was not alien to her. She was capable of amusing herself - often at the expense of others - at frequent social gatherings and more intimate parties/'at homes', enjoying serious discussion but not averse to a 'regular old-fashioned gossip' (16.6.1862), or practical joke. She sought stimulating and diverting company, on one occasion lamenting that there was 'no fun or frolic' in an acquaintance. Their father may have disapproved of levity, but, interspersed with episodes of 'low' or 'depressed' spirits, there are accounts of 'much laughter'; the

‘crew’ frequently wearied,³⁷ exhausted or ‘nearly disgraced themselves with laughing’ (27.5.1862).³⁸

The early log books show that Stretton and her sisters availed themselves of the opportunities provided by church gatherings, lectures and bible studies for making such entertainment as they could for themselves, finding amusement in local gossip and petty scandals - often surrounding church personalities. As well as reflecting the serious critical interest which Stretton showed throughout her life in the content of sermons, the log books suggest that some meetings provoked ‘convulsions’ and were judged ‘better than a comic entertainment’ (Log Book: 4.1.1862). They reveal during 1861/2 that the preacher often proved more of a distraction than the preaching; it was not unusual to be ‘pleased with the sermon’ but ‘disgusted with the preacher’, who might be pronounced ‘brawny and animal looking’ or ‘conceited and ugly’ despite a good sermon. Conversely, a speaker might be deemed an ‘exquisite clergyman’, and his physical features admired at length despite the assessment of his lecture as ‘complete rubbish’; it was to be hoped that one convert would be ‘changed bodily as well as spiritually’. Sermons also provided unspecified material for Stretton’s books: ‘leading idea for a chapter in the big book’ (Log Book: 18.11.1860). The preoccupations and peculiarities of Shropshire society (in which, as Cutt, 1979, 119 agrees, the sisters felt themselves to be perceived as partial outsiders and ‘curiosities’, Log Book: 19.12.1860), and the mocking appraisal of events and acquaintances - the latter often likened to characters in Dickens’s novels - contributed to an apprenticeship in social observation and satire which is reflected in the humorous undertones and often trenchant social commentary in her texts.

1.6 Releasing captives: motifs of freedom and containment

‘The yearning after freedom is next to the yearning after God in human nature’, asserts the narrator of The Soul of Honour (Ch.13). This desire for freedom, as will become clear, is central to Hesba Stretton’s narratives, whether it concerns spatial freedom, freedom from poverty, from enslavement, literal and metaphorical,³⁹ or from forms of authority/oppression - patriarchal, institutional or governmental. The sense of freedom offered by the spaces of Stretton’s native countryside is palpable in her textual descriptions of open, rural situations - descriptions which, as well as evoking the

pastoral, express the wildness and sensuality of the landscape, and suggest an abandonment of restraint and a liberation of the spirit. Her diaries evidence her passion for walking - sometimes a social but often a solitary occupation - on the hills and moorlands of her native Shropshire, and later in the wild, mountainous areas or fertile valleys of Switzerland.⁴⁰ Such activities, offering time and space for reflection, were clearly expected to provide a creative stimulus: 'went on the ramble at night to catch an idea; no success' (Log Book: 17.11.1863). Locations yielded literal material for her journalism;⁴¹ they furnished important settings for her narratives and, significantly, multifaceted symbolism within her texts. Stretton experienced the forest as 'delicious', and it is clearly this current of self-awareness and sensuality which feeds her textual evocation of the potent and liberating allure, as well as the comforts, of natural landscapes.

Set against this is an apparent fear, approaching phobic proportions, of containment or imprisonment, which is a persistent motif in her narratives - both in literal terms, as in texts such as In Prison and Out (1880), and as metaphor. Diary entries reveal that Stretton at times felt a prisoner of her circumstances - and, likewise, of the incessantly wet and cold Shropshire weather which seemingly conspired to hold her captive within the house. The claustrophobic confinement presented by the small, rented and bug-ridden 'hovels' which the sisters occupied during their early travels, or by the Swiss hotel room, where she felt 'in a trap' (Log Book: 15.7.1875), is translated into the many textual allusions to 'entrapment' or 'encagement'. It is echoed in the dark and suffocating spaces of city streets and slum-houses, and evoked in the cramped prison cell which is home to a protagonist in David Lloyd's Last Will.⁴² Similarly, it is present in the 'enclosed' surroundings which threaten Martin, of Half Brothers, and the 'crib' or outhouse in which frightened young pranksters - from her early text The Children of Cloverley (1865, Ch.11) to the later narrative A Man of His Word (1878) - are locked. Sharing with the protagonist of The Storm of Life (1876, Ch.8) an 'ungovernable longing to break out', Stretton could begin to identify with the frustrations of those unwillingly 'encaged' in jail, workhouse or stifling urban court.

At a wider level this motif of confinement can be seen to extend to an articulation of women's social and domestic imprisonment - in its many guises - within patriarchal society. Repeatedly, we find female protagonists confined in Gothic-seeming

enclosures in the face of patriarchal collusion, as in the early The Clives of Burcot (1867), sometimes with complicity on the part of other women. The motif of the manipulating older woman again merges with the cultural/fairy-tale trope of the wicked stepmother in the late text In the Hollow of His Hand (1897, Ch.29), where the witch-like Matoushka locks a young girl in a windowless closet and treats her like a slave.

Stretton's stance is frequently complicated by conflicting currents. The diaries expose the personal dimension which interacts with wider cultural contradictions; such tensions, I will argue, are at the crux of Stretton's writing. The rural landscape itself may represent a life-affirming force, but day-to-day existence in the country for the nearly-thirty-year-old Stretton and her sisters, besides being 'not so civilised as we believe it to be' (Log Book: 2.11.1860), is at times represented as stultifying - marked by an absence of 'events', or by 'prolonged calm', with (in a self-consciously melodramatic outburst) 'life a fog + the world a dungeon' (5.12.1860). As I will establish in my exploration of all the themes embraced by this study, the stasis and predictability of country life which she bemoans in her diaries is the very quality which facilitates her textual engagement with different points of view - perhaps offering encounters, for writer and audience, between what Peter Hollindale (2001, 30) describes as 'safe', 'predictable' and 'uncontrolled and risky' movement-patterns. Boredom gives rise to a restlessness such as that experienced by the protagonist of The Doctor's Dilemma (1872), whose life is characterised by 'peaceful monotony', 'dull, lonely safety' and 'sleepy security', and who is plagued by a longing to 'get away from silence and solitude, even if it were into insecurity and danger' (Part I, Ch.5). Personal frustrations engender an appreciation of the 'stir' of the inferno, of the 'chances and changes' of a nomadic existence (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.5) - of even the hardships which supply 'that spice of excitement without which existence is a tedious monotony' (Half Brothers, Ch.54), and which, paradoxically, can be found in situations which are the very opposite of pastoral utopias in terms of physical and moral attributes.

Instances of textual ambivalence are perhaps illuminated by Stretton's affirmation of apparently opposing facets. In contrast to her impressions, in January 1868, of London's East End as a 'horrible place', a subsequent entry suggests a preference for the East rather than the West, perhaps presaging the eventual conviction that its poverty was 'not more sordid and mean than much of the wealth of West London', with human

nature the same in both (The Soul of Honour, Ch.16).⁴³ A further link might be suggested between Stretton's own ambivalence concerning town/country and the sentiments expressed by the narrator of this end-of-century novel, a text which engages with East End philanthropy and the pursuits of slumming and strolling.⁴⁴ The first-person narrative by city dweller/worker Phebe⁴⁵ articulates the 'irresistible attraction' of the city (Ch.11) - a fascination which, as I will demonstrate throughout, makes its presence felt in her writing to multiple effect. Phebe, now unable to 'bear to be away from the streets', with their darkly-rising walls and obscure corners where 'crime and misery might find a hiding-place', begins 'to understand how citizens could not break away from it, and would yearn to get back to it from the loveliest of country places' (Ch.11).

A horror of all institutions and regulations also emerges. Even the cramped lodgings about which Stretton complained so relentlessly in her diaries were deemed preferable to the governesses' institutions which she and her sister viewed: they preferred 'a small house + freedom' (To 7.2.1865), and later that year 'resolved to live in a cellar, rather than go there' - a determination reinforced, admittedly, by the sight of the governesses, 'so ugly and common looking'. During their stay in France, the prospect of consenting, in return for Convent accommodation, to 'going out only once a week, and then with a sister with us', simply 'would not do' (6.12.1866). The 'wilderness' setting of one particular lodging place - however remote and inconvenient - appealed not only because of its proximity to the forest, but also because they were 'not in bondage to anyone' (19.8.1868).⁴⁶ Stretton's dislike of conformity/imposed restrictions, and her desire for self-determination, surface in a resistance to containment on the part of protagonists, as, for example, in Carola's chafing against the 'network' of school rules (Carola, 1884, Ch.7), and the reaction of the nomadic protagonists of The Lord's Pursebearers - loathe to give up their 'free, adventurous life' - to the sight of institutionalised children walking out two by two (Ch.10). In a letter to The Times (8.1.1885), Stretton decries the inhumane restrictions of children's homes which render them more like workhouses than homes. Wider cultural tendencies interact, combine and conflict - sometimes simultaneously - with personal fears/desires and shifting attitudes; her protests at the new freedoms sought by young girls (The Times, 8.1.1884) are in tension with the later narratorial endorsement of the urgency for modern-spirited girls to be emancipated from

outmoded rules of conduct (The Soul of Honour, Ch.4). The yearning for independence - to be one's 'own mistress' and no longer 'a girl under authority' (The Soul of Honour, Ch.21), although sometimes competing with more conventional versions of womanhood, is a force throughout her texts, surfacing in her representations of social and gender relations as well as economic struggles.

1.7 The fate of a woman

The log books encompass the period during which, as a result of the diminishing energies of 'paterfamilias', the female 'crew' bore much of the responsibility for managing the post-office. Such work had become more complex and onerous since the days of Stretton's childhood, as she makes clear in an early article which draws on her upbringing in the environment. For children, excitedly taking responsibility for certain post-office duties, and privy to local gossip and intrigues, the categories of work and play are blurred ('A Provincial Post-Office', All The Year Round, 28.2.1863). In contrast, the short story, 'The Postmaster's Daughter', which appeared in All The Year Round (5.11.1859), suggests the sacrifices involved in being 'chained to the office-counter all the days of my youth' (39); the account clearly draws on the girls' own experiences of struggling, short-handed and under 'straitened circumstances', to manage a failing business. A series of entries in Stretton's diary regarding the fate of the office highlights the limitations imposed upon women, and their general exclusion from the business world. Following a decision that Hannah should apply to take over the office on their father's retirement as postmaster, various exertions on the part of the sisters to obtain the backing of influential persons met with the opinion that 'women ought not to be in a P.O., not capable of the work, too curious, &c. &c.; no go.' (Log Book: 1-5 March, 1862).⁴⁷ Competition for the office from male clerks resulted in 'no chance for Hannah' (Period to 26.3.1862), to whom the burden of looking after home and ageing father fell, as the other sisters broadened their horizons. Stretton's consciousness of the similar fate which awaited many women of the period is reflected in textual observations such as that made by the narrator of Bede's Charity (1872): resolving to keep single for the sake of father and brother, she refuses offers of marriage (Ch.3), and lets 'the chances pass one after another' (Ch.1). However, as far as the world of business management was concerned, Stretton was in no way prepared to be excluded, as will become apparent from my discussion of publishing matters.

Although there is no indication in the log books that the preoccupation reflects conscious personal experience, there is, as will emerge from my discussion of representations of womanhood, an insistent motif in her texts concerning the lack of value placed by fathers on the female child. Diary entries, despite labelling her father, together with others of his sex, as 'curious', reveal no suggestion of any antagonism towards him which might be linked with the repeated textual trope of the hated patriarchal figure who controls the life/decision-making of his female child. They do, however, suggest indignation - possibly light-hearted - about their father's failure, on one occasion, to perceive them as adults: on leaving for Manchester, he bad them be 'good children [heavily underlined]' while he was away (Log Book: 4.9.1863).

Early log book entries reveal a somewhat ironic preoccupation with the 'matrimonial question', which assumed increasing importance (9.7.1860) as Lizzie approached thirty with 'no prospects' (18.8.1860). The experiment with 'dreamers' was unproductive, with 'no young men haunting [their] visions', although 'Lizzie dreamed of the Prince of Wales' (14.12.1860), and later of a certain family of male visitors. An entry on 13.2.1861 which records 'Bushels of valentines' probably applies to general mail delivered to the office, which would, nevertheless, have been the object of excitement and gossip. The search for marriage partners became something of a project; it was treated flippantly by the sisters, as evidenced by the somewhat playful scrutiny of numerous men as possible candidates (one 'would do for any of the crew in the matrimonial line', Log Book: 1.9.1861), with the exercise resulting largely in rejection or at least partial dissatisfaction. The attempt to find an eligible male for at least one of the three unmarried sisters (Annie was already married) became a joint endeavour, with Sara offering a present to either Hannah or Lizzie if they succeeded (30.12.1861). On 18.4.1862 it was 'proposed that one of us do make it our business to get married, + the others help all they can'. There is a sense that it was, at times, a question of playing the game in order to gratify expectations or mischievously to feed the speculations of outsiders. External pressures and naturalised/internalised assumptions perhaps engendered the feeling that they should conform to convention: Stretton mockingly describes herself as feeling 'virtuous and married, having a house to look after' (Log Book: 18.10.1862).⁴⁸ The diaries suggest a satisfaction in monitoring the progress of romantic liaisons, or the vicissitudes of marital life in respect of others in their social

circle. However, Stretton only once records feeling 'an actual wish for a young man available on high days and holidays', arguably for the sake of appearances, but perhaps reflecting a more deep-seated desire to be 'more like other people' (25.12.1861).

However strident her criticism about individual males and men in general - they inspired 'little faith', showed a lack of care in emotional matters, and were variously labelled by her as strange, foolish, liars or cheats - Stretton frequently appeared to enjoy male company, sometimes championing their cause against the women in their lives. Accounts of her relationships and encounters often carry flirtatious overtones; conversations encompass topics both weighty and frivolous, with 'hard-talking' sessions on 'beauty, virtue, and death' (Log Book: 24.1.1863), on love, marriage or kissing, physiognomy and unequal unions. M. Nancy Cutt speculates about possible instances of more definite romantic aspirations, as ambiguously suggested by diary entries,⁴⁹ and it is possible that such aspirations find displacement in the romantic relationships which abound in Stretton's stories and novels. Disparaging log book references to 'old maids' of the sisters' acquaintance betray an element of self-mockery, and, along with similar textual allusions, underline contemporary fears surrounding the implications/stigma of spinsterhood. Either disappointment or irony may be read in the entry which records a shared 'lamenting' of the 'carriage in which we might have ridden' (Log Book: 6-9.9.1863).⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Stretton's writing demonstrates an equal scepticism about marriage and its constraints; she doubtless shared Hannah's view of it as 'committing an imprudence', and endorsed the dire warnings issued by Lizzie. At times, she clearly found the behaviour/attitudes of married acquaintances puzzling. In the displaced setting of later texts such as The Highway of Sorrow, Stretton uses different cultural customs to point up attitudes at home: the prolongation of girlhood - the 'only happy time we women have in life' before going 'under the yoke' - is suggested as desirable (Ch.14). Exposure of male ownership/manipulation of woman - whose fate it is 'to do as she is ordered' (Ch.14), with marriage decided in accordance with arbitrary patriarchal will - dominates her writing. If, in line with the observation by Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble (1993, 101), we recognise an endorsement of patriarchal authority/norms of respectability in the use, by Stretton's acquaintance Mrs. Henry Wood, of a double patronymic, it is perhaps significant that in adopting *her* pseudonym, Hesba Stretton was in fact refusing the patriarchal name of Smith

altogether, thus asserting her sense of self and independence of male power/protection. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that spinsterhood did, after all, enable Stretton to maintain control over her own business affairs and earnings, as Suzanne Rickard (1996) points out. Like the heroine of The Soul of Honour (1898, Ch.22), who recognises that 'isolation gives me freedom', Stretton perhaps appreciated her avoidance of the 'trammels' of the marital relationship.

M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 120) suggests that unlike her *alter ego*, Hesba Stretton, Sarah Smith had a low opinion of women. Whilst this is evident in certain instances, I would argue that the picture is more complex, with a greater ambivalence suggested not only in texts, as I will discuss, but also in diaries and correspondence. Certainly, Stretton was not afraid to castigate her own sex at times, acknowledging and denigrating traditional myth-grounded faults: in a letter to the Editor (The Times, 30.6.1884) on the subject of child-protection, she suggests that, unlike children, women are often 'excessively provocative', there being 'nothing so bitter as a woman's tongue'. She then refers to a comment by General Gordon, associating Eve's first eating of the apple with 'our bad and sad pre-eminence in this respect'.⁵¹ In so doing, she invokes, as had Charlotte Yonge in 'Womankind' (1876, 1-2), the supporting discourse for dominant myths of female inferiority; on other occasions, as I will show, Stretton overtly contests this notion of women as inferior beings.

Casual comments betray an impatient and critical attitude towards many female acquaintances. Stretton found the amiability of some to be 'unmitigated agony' (Log Book: 1.8.1860); she characterised others variously as 'ugly and stupid', 'fat, silly and empty', or, in the case of participants in the Dorcas meetings, 'stiff' or 'stone-eyed'.⁵² Whilst she criticised 'wet-blankets' or 'meek' women, who 'never opened their mouths', she found others of her sex 'vulgar and loud-voiced', 'domineering' or 'selfish and exacting'. Of Mrs. Henry Wood, she commented: 'little in her + can talk only of her own affairs' (Log Book: 20.10.1867). Stretton's acquaintance with Mrs. Henry Wood and her son Charles developed over a period of time; she records numerous social occasions spent in their company, and, as M. Nancy Cutt comments, showed considerable interest in the affairs of the latter.⁵³ Interference by Mrs. Henry Wood in the concerns of her son is recorded cryptically in the identification of a 'slight symptom of "mother" influence' (25.10.1867). Such personal observations are suggested in

repeated textual instances of the manipulative mother or mother-in-law, whether this is in the figure of the possessive and interfering Mrs. Arnold (Carola), or the mother in The Highway of Sorrow, whose natural feelings of resentment towards a prospective daughter-in-law are recognised.⁵⁴ However, Stretton's attitudes to both sexes were notoriously changeable; she was capable of revising her opinions several times over the course of a short space of time, and she periodically records enjoyment of female company, including what she describes as 'petticoat picnic[s]' (Log Book: 28.7.1862).

The characteristics of textual protagonists reflect this ambivalence, with the narratorial voice alternately critical and empathetic. Attitudes are frequently complex and subject to revision. As I will establish, certain characters in Stretton's narratives embody contrasting ideals of womanhood, sometimes within the same person, or as polar extremes in binary models. Disapproval of the vain, empty-headed or 'coquettish' woman - easily able to beguile male protagonists into ill-judged marriages - surfaces in her writing, whether in the guise of the fairy-like, aptly-named Mab of David Lloyd's Last Will, or the young, worldly or inappropriate brides/would-be brides of Half Brothers and The Soul of Honour. The more serious-minded, socially-aware female - able to work on an equal basis with men - emerges, particularly in later novels, as the ideal, but 'energy' and 'life' are equally prized. Impatience (or fascination) with the immature, frivolous female may have its roots in Stretton's own disposition/views, but disapproval also accorded with the ethos of the Religious Tract Society, whose reports demonstrate a preoccupation with countering, in their literature for 'young ladies' and/or 'educated and refined society', the tendency towards 'worldly dissipation', 'frivolous education and pursuits' or of 'yielding to a desire for gaiety' (RTS Executive Committee Minutes, 21.5.1867). Despite the contemporary drive to safeguard young girls from the excesses of a more liberated, materially obsessed existence, certain counter-currents, particularly in Stretton's later writing, suggest the overprotection of women as unhelpful (Half Brothers, Ch. 5). The young Sophy may be foolish, romantic and pleasure-seeking, but she is also perceived as hardy, and potentially able to 'manage' for herself. In the same text, the Colonel's desire to adopt Eastern customs in order to exclude women entirely from the public sphere - to stop them 'sowing seeds of mischief' - is exposed with patently condemnatory intent (Ch.5). Strong, self-reliant women are often championed in her texts, but if a man is to be sought - and the quest

for a romantic partner is seldom abandoned completely in her fiction - he must also be a guide, someone to lean on. Early in her career, The Clives of Burcot suggests marriage as a 'solution'; in Hester Morley's Promise, Stretton shows an awareness of the institution as an escape route from the drudgery of conventional occupations such as teaching, perhaps reflecting her own or her sister's sentiments.⁵⁵

Hesba Stretton was astute at identifying and representing textually the opinions of others. A protagonist in David Lloyd's Last Will, asserts that 'men don't like to marry clever women' (Ch.14), which may constitute an indictment of male attitudes or disapproval of the 'bluestocking'; it may also suggest self-justification or 'sour grapes'. If Stretton frequently displayed a conviction in texts and campaigning correspondence that women's sphere of influence was the home, she personally enjoyed the freedom to travel extensively at home and abroad, without the restrictions and responsibilities of marriage and conventional domesticity.⁵⁶ However, as will become clear, her fictional narratives investigate the complexity of female roles and experiences, particularly in relation to the maternal. Arguably, an increasing recognition of different kinds of women - leading different lives, and subject to different constraints - and the existence of different moralities, is the product of experience, developed through her practical involvement in diverse spheres, and through the process of literary exploration and self-realisation. The interviewer, Hulda Friederichs, noted her subject's engagement with the 'Woman question' (1894, 329), and Stretton's writing at times contests dominant assumptions of male supremacy as innate. Authorial endorsement of the notion of the 'superiority of women' is overtly affirmed, towards the end of her literary career, in her narrative The Soul of Honour. In this text, such a realisation is conveyed by peers rather than through the agency of the older, instructing, generation, who 'gave us to understand that marriage with a good settlement is the aim and end of every woman's life' (Ch.8).⁵⁷

Despite her tendency to be judgemental, Stretton the novelist is also perceptive in identifying misperceptions and entrenched positions. As my examination of textual roles and relationships reveals, Hesba Stretton observes and analyses notions of otherness which serve to perpetuate the gulf between the sexes. As in life, men may be misunderstood - regarded as 'different' (Bede's Charity, Ch.3), or as 'beasts' to women unaccustomed to their company (A Thorny Path, 1879, Ch.6); the female sex may be

perceived as alien to men unused to 'women and their ways', but as my study will demonstrate, assumptions can be dismantled and barriers broken down.

1.8 Security and social spheres

Hesba Stretton's journals and her fictional narratives display a preoccupation with the issue of unequal marriage - sometimes in terms of unequal (religious) yoking,⁵⁸ sometimes in relation to the incompatibility of 'unequal minds'. Texts frequently focus on differences of social class, exploring the consequences of marrying below status, or out of one's 'station'. The author's engagement with the position of women as dependent, or as 'slaves', is enmeshed with ideas regarding financial security and the precariousness of material/social situations. Textual mockery of the social snobbery exhibited by protagonists coping with, or reprieved from, a decline in status - fearful of being 'reduced to poverty and cotton gloves' (David Lloyd's Last Will, Vol.2, Ch.14) - is tempered by a shared fear of such a fall, of becoming 'the other'.

As critics such as Cutt (1979, 119) and Bratton (1981, 93) have observed, the near working-class status of Stretton's family placed them to some extent on the edge of society. Such ambiguity of position, as well as facilitating cross-class sympathies, accentuates the precariousness of boundaries between different social/financial spheres. In the diaries, internalised prejudices and concomitant perceptions of discomfort or insecurity manifest themselves in the form of assumptions - perhaps ironic and self-mocking - about social place, and in expressions of relief about events which contribute to material stability. It was 'with great rejoicing' that sums such as the £375 paid on one occasion by The Tract Society (Log Book: 18.1.1870), were invested. Fears regarding status also make their presence felt in the note of superiority which surfaces in journal entries from time to time, with the identification/assessment of people, audiences or sets of women as 'common', 'insufferably vulgar', and occasionally both. After an incident at the post-office in which Stretton was accused by a customer of insolence - a charge denied by her father in view of her 'retiring disposition' - she playfully registers a degree of intellectual superiority, observing: 'plaintiff is only a base mechanic; defendant quite a literary character!' (26.7.1861). On acquiring new rooms in October 1864, Stretton notes the 'common inhabitants' of the row of small houses, adding 'not altogether our proper sphere yet'. An entry made on 20.1.1866, reveals that

the sisters deemed themselves fit for a world 'a little better than this'. (They nonetheless felt 'a little out of our element' on arriving at new rooms in the 'very stylish' neighbourhood of Bayswater in January 1870.) In her fiction, Stretton's impoverished protagonists, as I shall demonstrate, are frequently found to be 'naturally refined' or 'of better stock' than those of the 'lowest' classes of poor.⁵⁹

Ambivalence towards wealth is apparent; condemnation of the pursuit of Mammon is complicated by an awareness of the effects of financial constraint or catastrophe. Despite diary references to friends becoming 'rather lifted up with their money' (Log Book: 3.7.1869) or being 'made no happier' by it (To 11.11.1865), and narrative endorsement of such sentiments, we can identify a frank acknowledgment of the benefits which financial security offers, not least in terms of self-determination or the amelioration of the circumstances of others. Throughout Hesba Stretton's texts, a religious view of material affluence as unimportant, and the evident privations/limitations of reduced circumstances are in tension. Money may, ultimately, not be of over-riding importance, and experience of poverty may enlarge character and soul, but texts show that choice is crucial, as in The Soul of Honour, where eventual financial security permits the *decision* to adopt a frugal and philanthropic lifestyle, to 'throw in one's lot' with the poor. Miserly hoarding is shown to be ill-judged in numerous texts, but Stretton clearly appreciated the wisdom of sound investment, purchasing consols (Log Book: 11.2.69) - as does the eponymous Carola - and eventually amassing a sizeable portfolio of property and assets.⁶⁰ Like the first-person narrator of The Soul of Honour, she was perhaps 'distinctly happier in having ample means at [her] disposal' - 'glad to know [she] had money in [her] purse' (Ch.27), or to experience the pleasure of spending 'without counting the pence' ('Eleven Hundred Pounds', 13.8.1864, 17).

The narratives articulate the conflict between a doctrine of self-improvement, and contemporary anxieties over unfettered materialism; they demonstrate the pitfalls of men's pursuit of financial rewards and concomitant engagement with risk in the business world. Although close and supportive sibling relationships figure prominently in Stretton's fictions, there is, as I will discuss, a sense of bitterness as well as pride in texts such as Bede's Charity regarding the brother who 'deserts' the family in search of material improvement abroad. Stretton, whose brother Ben emigrated to Canada, may,

like the protagonist Margery, have felt some sense of betrayal. That the absence of maternal support is compounded by a lack of 'brotherly companionship' is certainly suggested in the early story 'The Postmaster's Daughter' (5.11.1859, 37). An impatience with poor business management is confirmed by Captain Webb, who alleges that Stretton disapproved of his own father on this account; he also reveals, in commenting on her later diaries, a concern which chimes with an evident textual preoccupation with financial ruin: 'Collapse of the Liberator; ruined thousands' (Diary comment, October 1892, cited by Webb, 1964, 15).⁶¹

1.9 Representing and reclaiming outcasts

Attitudes to, and textual representations of, society's poor and outcast are undoubtedly coloured by personal insecurities and class prejudices, and complicated by underlying tensions - the disjunction between ideals consciously aspired to and assumptions rooted in the unconscious. As I will demonstrate in my focus on outcast society, sympathy towards, and understanding of, the outcast is juxtaposed with implicitly condemnatory references to vulgarity, coarseness and inferiority. In this respect, it is important not to lose sight of contemporary assumptions; assessment of members of other social classes as vulgar or coarse is perhaps as much descriptive as evaluative,⁶² part of a 'common-sense' process of categorisation which operated in relation to notions of 'difference'.

Stretton's published texts, rather more than the diaries, articulate her *feelings* of compassion for, as well as her interest in, the poor and outcast classes. Although little mention is made in the journal, an investigation of the work of 'The Blackburn Sewing Schools' during the 1862 recession is recorded in her article of that title in 1863, and material regarding the concomitant deprivation used for David Lloyd's Last Will several years later. The move to Manchester in October 1863 clearly furnished an extended insight into the conditions of poverty in that city, as well as providing a specific context for novels such as Pilgrim Street (1867). Despite the fact that Jessica's First Prayer (1867) was set in the Capital city, it was, according to Captain Webb, Stretton's experience, in the company of a policeman, of the 'disgusting streets' of the East End of London (Log Book: 17.2.1868.) which represented a true initiation into the 'tragic reality of the lives of the poor' (Webb, 1964, 11). Stretton set about familiarising herself further with the streets of London, visiting Ragged Schools and

homes, including a shoe-black's house (Log Book: 5.3.1868), and acquainting herself with the work of reformers and charitable organisations. Writing in 1875 about her meeting with Dr. Barnardo a few years earlier, and her subsequent visit to Stepney-causeway (*sic*), she identified: 'that peculiar aspect of mere vulgar, modern wretchedness and dirt, which takes away from the East End of London any claim to picturesque poverty' (Introduction to G. Holden Pike, 1875, xi).

The intensified focus on the situation of the poor inevitably converged with another deeply rooted preoccupation. As suggested, Stretton's interest in children is evidenced by diary material and correspondence. Children within her own family invariably delighted her; she sought contact with them and often took responsibility for their care. Recording social activities with adults, Stretton frequently notes that they were 'playing like children' (Log Book: 12.2.1864; 18.5.1864), a characteristic which surfaces in her representations of the old. An intimation of what was to become a major engagement, both practically and textually, with the plight of the displaced child is contained in an early diary entry, which records the discovery of a child who has temporarily strayed from her family (21.10.1861). Similarly, an early philanthropic gesture is recorded in the encounter with a 'poor girl' who was 'without a penny' with which to buy a ticket to travel (17.9.1864); a comment, in respect of their lodgings (1.8.1866), about 'a little girl of eight' carrying out all the work, presages her concern with the enforced domestic role of the child. From Stretton's earliest published writings, such engagement is evident; reflecting a confluence of psychological needs, intellectual and practical drives, it was to be directed into concrete and energetic forms of action. She later wrote: 'That women should work for children is as natural as that the sun shine or the rain fall' (Stretton, 1893, 4).

As her practical involvement and awareness of the extent of childhood deprivation increased, so her focus on the abused or neglected child became more emphatic and angry. In a later account, she writes of the 'horrible cruelty practised on little children' which she had witnessed in the 'miserable slums' on a visit with the Rector of an East End parish ('The Origin of the London S.P.C.C.', 1908). Stretton does not dwell in the diaries on her feelings about the plight of the maltreated and dispossessed - the journal discloses few details of her actual experiences - but the log books make reference to numerous visits. Entries, though terse, chart her continued efforts during the 1870s to

inform herself regarding conditions of poverty, its effects on parents, and the consequences for children; she spent time in orphanages, infirmaries, children's hospices, refuges, missions and shelters.⁶³ Her response to her discoveries, and her commitment to social amelioration and consciousness-raising, are articulated in published texts, fictional and non-fictional, contributing extensively to her social project. Her narratives engage with the increasingly urgent contemporary preoccupation at both individual and wider social levels, with child rescue - the desire to play a part, actually and financially, in 'lift[ing] some child out of the deep and horrible pit, and plac[ing] it in a safe and happy home' (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.8).⁶⁴ Such sentiments resonate with those expressed in the waif story Scamp and I by L.T. Meade, in which a donation is 'to be spent on the first little homeless London child you care to devote to it to' (1877, Ch.15).⁶⁵ By the time of Stretton's active campaigning, during the 1880s, for the formation of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, she was able to claim that 'for the last 20 years I have interested myself deeply in the condition of the children of the poor' (Letter to The Times, 8.1.1884). Awareness of 'active cruelty among our degraded and criminal classes' led her to press for the means to 'deliver us as a nation from the curse and crime, the shame and sin of neglected and oppressed childhood' (The Times, 8.1.1884).⁶⁶

Despite this apparent indictment of the 'degraded' classes, and the sometimes harsh wording of Appeals for support, Stretton calls into question the issue of cruelty as class-specific. At the same time, she highlights the connection between abuse/neglect and material conditions. In a lengthy exchange of correspondence in The Times during 1885, she draws attention to the mismanagement, by an Anglican sisterhood, of an orphan home where two girls have been subjected to brutal corporal punishment (The Times, 8.1.1885); she foregrounds the need for, and encourages debate concerning, the surveillance of institutions. Enraged by such abuse, Stretton demands of the reader: 'If a trained and cultivated woman calling herself a sister of charity can so yield to cruel and passionate impulses as to cane helpless girls entrusted to her care ... what can we expect from poverty-stricken, drunken and degraded men and women whose children are a burden and a hindrance to them?' Such sentiments underpin the strand in her writing which exposes the effects of deprivation on human responses, and at times represents the perceived wrong-doer with empathy. Stretton decries the use of physical

chastisement, expressing a reluctance 'to believe any child incorrigible' (The Times, 13.1.1885). She takes issue with the respondent ('Common Sense'), who laments the perceived encouragement of 'rebellion and disorder' (not to mention descent into juvenile prostitution) through the misguided softening of attitudes towards 'bad girls' and 'incorrigible thieves and liars' by teachers and philanthropists (The Times, 10.1.1885; 16.1.1885). Engaging with a variety of cultural/social debates and discourses, Stretton had for some time been exploring textually the intricacies of dealing with 'bad girls', and with 'incorrigible thieves and liars'; my examination of roles and relationships will reveal the complex and sometimes conflicting reactions to these issues embodied in her public and private writings.

1.10 Peaceful prosperity; revolution and the Russian texts

The current of rebellion about which Stretton displays such ambivalence in her texts is bound up with her outrage at the abuse of power in all forms, and the concomitant need to liberate the oppressed; as such it leads to her engagement with other, sometimes unlikely, champions of the outcast. Although she is quoted by Webb (1964, 15) as stating in 1892, at the age of 60, that she had found the previous decade more interesting, more useful, and more *peaceful* (my italics) than any other, some of the activities and themes inscribed in her writing during the final decade of the century centre on ideas and events associated, in implication and practical terms, as much with revolution as with peace. Such a cause is Stretton's commitment to exposing the political and religious persecution of the Russian Stundist Sect. This 'Russian connection', and the texts which result from her association with leading Russian anarchists, will be explored as an extension of my focus on outcast society. As I will discuss, Captain Webb's notes and isolated extracts indicate that Stretton's diary entries regarding her activities in this respect were, as ever, frustratingly terse, and the sparseness of quotations is disappointing. Investigation into textual themes and into relevant personal/cultural factors, however, proves illuminating. Appealing to Stretton's engagement with the oppressed or excluded, and at the same time providing a textual focus, such preoccupations possibly also furnished a counterbalance to the comfortable, prosperous and ostensibly more tranquil - yet perhaps inherently more 'stagnant'- existence which she enjoyed during the final decade of the century. They perhaps constituted a vehicle for articulating the frustrations of 'other', competing

selves. Having achieved independence and stability, and now settled, with her sister, in her own house on Ham Common, Stretton may have fitted the image of the 'charming, sensible, old maiden lady' which she had envisioned in David Lloyd's Last Will in 1869 as the future manifestation of the 'clever woman', and which accords with her legendary public persona. Later texts, with their underlying implications, together with the glimpses afforded by other sources, suggest ambivalence about the acceptance of such a role.

Stretton continued to write during the 1890s and beyond, publishing several full-length novels. Although there is some evidence of maturing protagonists as Stretton herself matures, these late texts, including the 'Russian' narratives, focus on the romantic preoccupations of youthful protagonists, as well as charting the process of self-development and realisation of mature affection, as had her earliest writings for the adult market. Situations of poverty still feature in her work; at the same time there is renewed attention to middle-class anxieties, with some convergence of motifs and a continued emphasis on moral complexity. Political concerns centring on forms of 'otherness' or marginalisation, sometimes relocated in different surroundings - whether such issues form central themes or underlying currents - are articulated at various levels. The later writings of Hesba Stretton demonstrate an engagement with the radical revolutionary processes implicated in social and cultural change, which is in tension with conservative/reconciliatory stances, as I will confirm in exploring textual representations of social, power and gender relations.

In 1906, aged 74, Stretton professes herself, in a published text, painfully aware of the solitude of later years.⁶⁷ Prefacing her selection of others' Thoughts on Old Age - a collection built up over time and embracing the philosophies of writers, poets and thinkers from Confucius, Plato and Cicero, through to the authors of her day - Stretton comments on her experiences of growing old.⁶⁸ She claims to find peace and tranquillity in having 'finished one's work of youth and middle life' (1906, 4), perhaps endorsing Benjamin Jowett's appreciation of being 'free from illusions about wealth, or rank, or love, or even about religion' (73), and drawing parallels, unsurprisingly, between aspects of the state of old age and that of childhood (5). If she likewise endorsed the sentiments of Shakespeare that 'Youth is wild and Age is tame' (18) - and certainly her texts focus on the wildness and spirit of youth as well as the restraint of

maturity - it might conceivably also be argued that a 'wilder' Hesba Stretton - not altogether amenable to being tamed - is continually threatening to surface, resisting 'self-government' and the impositions of others, throughout her life and work.

¹ Biographical aspects have been documented by a number of writers. In particular, M. Nancy Cutt (1979) and J.S. Bratton (1981) give dense and perceptive overviews of Stretton's life, literary career and the relationship of her work to contemporary issues of social reform. Both Cutt and Bratton draw, to a certain extent, on log book material, and their concerns at times overlap with the considerations of this study. I wish to open up new areas, but will refer to similar entries where these are germane to my themes/discussion, where ideas invite extension, or where alternative emphases/interpretations are pertinent.

² The questions raised by Judy Simons (1990) with regard to literary women's diaries are particularly helpful; I will model my discussion on her critical/theoretical framework, with particular reference to general questions raised on page 14 of her account and summarised in her conclusion.

³ Although school rolls are no longer available for the period concerned, her attendance is confirmed by the present day Old Hall School. It would appear that no records covering her time at the school remain.

⁴ An article in Seed Time and Harvest (December, 1911), following Stretton's death, is possibly by the same writer and utilises material contained in the Sunday Hours interview.

⁵ It is now recognised that numerous facets of what Cutt (1979, 115) describes as the 'sentimental' legend surrounding Stretton are misleading or inaccurate, and that Stretton was far more complex and less conventional in her outlook than the popular image suggested. (See also Rickard, 1996.)

⁶ In the Sunday Hours interview, Stretton speaks of her father's apprenticeship to John Houlston, 'one of the best-known provincial publishers of the beginning of this century'. She remembers from her childhood the 'clumsy, ebony-black wooden press', stored in one of the workrooms, 'on which had been printed many of the books written by Mrs. Sherwood and Mrs. Cameron, and the first effort of Harriet Martineau's pen' (164). Stretton's father was also post-master at Wellington.

⁷ See Hester Morley's Promise (1873): the child Hester 'was used to listen earnestly to the discussions and controversies often held in her father's parlor' (Ch.3).

⁸ In the interview under discussion, Stretton alludes to a schoolmaster's reproof about filling her head with nonsense; 'the book I was poring over was Chalmers's Astronomical Discourses' (164). If, as J.S. Bratton (1981, 26) observes, many evangelical writers had little contact with the artistic or literary world, this is not the case with Stretton. M. Nancy Cutt (1979) recognises Stretton's exposure to, and engagement with, intellectual ideas/debate. She does, however, suggest that the author was brought up on a diet of magazines which adversely affected her writing (146). Whilst the diaries of the 1850s and 60s confirm that magazine day was eagerly awaited, they also indicate, as do interviews such as the one given for Sunday Hours, the range of intellectual, social, romantic and popular influences/personal attitudes which, as I shall emphasise, converge and intermingle to important effect in Stretton's multifaceted writings. Contemporary reviewers particularly noted the impact on her writing of the breadth of her views of life. The importance of reading a wide range of books - and combining this with the wisdom of life - is repeatedly stressed in Hester Stretton's work. Within her narratives there are references by narrator or protagonists to texts ranging from Plato's 'Dialogues' to Malthus's 'Political Economy', through Shakespeare's Measure for Measure and the works of Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell and Thomas Carlyle. Stretton's emphasis on the value of reading is reflected in the establishment during the 1890s, through the efforts of Stretton and her sister, of a branch of the Popular Book Club in the area of their home at Ham.

⁹ As a contributor to Dickens's publications, she would also, undoubtedly, have read the work of other leading authors contained in Household Words, and subsequently All The Year Round. Many of Stretton's preoccupations overlap with those of Dickens, and as I will discuss, it is possible to identify a particular correspondence between the themes, motifs and sentiments of Stretton's writing and that of Mrs. Gaskell. Like Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848), subtitled 'A Tale of Manchester Life', Stretton's Pilgrim Street (1867) is 'A Story of Manchester Life'; among other correspondences, clear echoes of the episode of the fire at the mill in Gaskell's text can be found in Stretton's depiction of a similar mill fire. With regard to Stretton's relationship with Dickens himself, as M. Nancy Cutt concurs, the log books indicate that biographical entries which cite their 'friendship' are inaccurate. Although Stretton attended readings by Dickens, and lunched, in company with Mrs. Henry Wood, with Mrs. Charles Dickens, she apparently did not manage to arrange a meeting with the author himself. Stretton had considerable contact, at both business and social level, with Dickens's sub-editor, William Henry Wills, to whom she evidently intended to dedicate 'Rhoda' (The Clives of Burcot), before this novel was rejected by

Chapman and Hall. Diary entries show that the sisters displayed a playful interest in Wills until they discovered that he was older than they originally thought, and married.

¹⁰ See my particular discussion of Stretton's involvement with leading Russian anarchists (Chapter 7 of this study). Stretton also engages with the work of leading German theologians. In Hester Morley's Promise, the ideas of German rationalists form the subject of debate within the religious community.

¹¹ Hulda Friederichs met Stretton on several occasions before writing her article for The Young Woman (1894).

¹² A similar articulation of the charm of the supernatural appears in Hester Morley's Promise, in which the narrator comments on the desire of those who have abandoned past superstitions to 'taste again the thrill and creep of awe, with which they were wont to glance back over their shoulders for the hobgoblins of former times' (Ch.14). Engaging with persistent and deep-rooted fears, Stretton also speaks of the way in which the coming of darkness 'call[s] up all the sleeping, lurking fancies which dwell in every child's young brain' (A Man of His Word, 1878, Ch.5).

¹³ My research has not confirmed any substitute attachment on the part of her father; in a playful log book entry, late in his life, Stretton records: 'paterfamilias would a wooing go' (22.2.1861), and subsequently briefly refers to his 'courting' (24.12.1861).

¹⁴ Stretton describes her mother as a churchwoman, converted under Baptist minister Robert Hall; she became a Wesleyan, as was Stretton's father, upon her marriage. Stretton recalls that her mother had lived among Quakers - a fact which may have influenced Stretton's portrayal of the Quaker community who provide shelter and comfort to the shipwrecked protagonist of The Clives of Burcot (1867), and perhaps also contributed to her sense of women's equality. She also comments that the Smith children were baptised in Church as 'the Wesleyans were hardly reckoned Dissenters then.' Stretton, in her diaries, professes dissatisfaction on numerous occasions with the state of Wesleyan society/religion.

¹⁵ Webb commences: 'Many of the personal effects of Hesba Stretton are in this house; and among them are her diaries covering the period 1858 --- 1870. As well as these are journals for 1875; and 1884 --- 1896' (1964, 1). Webb's notes provide a commentary on Stretton's life, based on diary material which he considers 'noteworthy' (Webb, 1964, 1). He summarises selected entries and includes brief extracts. Comparison with the available diaries gives some indication of the quality of his account: his selection is inevitably subjective and his commentary at times reflects self-interest. He includes comments about his own health and a reference to the deletion of certain notes because of his dissatisfaction over some of the terms of Stretton's will. Nonetheless, he quotes reasonably accurately, albeit partially and sometimes ambiguously (it is not always clear whether he is commenting, paraphrasing or quoting), from Stretton's available diaries. Although some references appear trivial, and certain areas are not covered, he records a number of significant events. It is therefore to be assumed that his commentary/extracts for the later period are reasonably reliable, if limited.

¹⁶ Judy Simons (1990, 7) refers to general distinctions between the terms 'diary', 'journal' etc. In line with her approach, I will use the terms 'log book', 'diary' and 'journal' interchangeably.

¹⁷ As noted, she subsequently adopted the name 'Hesba Stretton'. The RTS archives contain a variable use of either name for a period of time. Her sister Lizzie, and a number of younger relatives, also adopted the name of Stretton, with 'Hesba' likewise featuring among later family forenames.

¹⁸ J.S. Bratton's essay 'Hesba Stretton's Journalism' (1979) concentrates on this aspect of Stretton's writing, summarising plots and drawing on log book entries.

¹⁹ 'Alice Gilbert' did not find her 'home' until March 1862, with Temple Bar. 'Rhoda' refers to The Clives of Burcot, which, after rejection by Chapman and Hall, was eventually published by Tinsley Brothers at the beginning of 1867. (Stretton records in her journal for December 1866, that 'Rhoda is already published'.)

²⁰ In the Sunday Hours interview, Stretton states that Michel Lorio's Cross was her favourite story, and that The Storm of Life was the text most clearly 'given to her'.

²¹ Sometimes a title is mentioned; often it is not.

²² It is interesting to speculate whether the text Cobwebs and Cables (1881) - unusual (as far as Stretton's writing is concerned) in its inclusion of a protagonist who is a professional writer - might represent, at least in part, aspects of Stretton's experience. The novel provides certain insights into the problems of writing and the difficulties facing the female author. For example, Stretton may have agreed with Felicita, who, distressed at finding herself, at a time of crisis, unable to write, suggests that it is only in writing that it is possible to 'give expression to the multitude of thoughts within' (Ch.10). This protagonist, later compelled by circumstances to write, finds that the practice has 'become tedious', with 'much vexation of spirit, as well as weariness of the flesh, in the making of many books' (Ch.40). As part of a narrative written at the start of a decade during which Stretton became more actively engaged in

practical reform, the sentiments of the protagonist might reflect a sense of disillusionment - perhaps temporary - about success/the writing profession. The work has 'lost its novelty' for the character, who has doubts about her originality; the 'circle of fame' is limited for even a successful writer, with 'petty enmities' and 'small friendships'.

²³ Issues of audience as applicable to Stretton's work as a whole will be the subject of scrutiny in Chapter 2, as will entries which relate specifically to the publishing context.

²⁴ The diaries intermittently chart the progress of her journalism and first novels (initially for an adult market), as well as the children's stories for which she was to become known, with occasional references to later writings.

²⁵ The spelling 'Sara' appears in the logbooks. According to a descendant of her brother, Ben, Stretton and other members of the family appear to have used the spellings interchangeably (Letter from Mrs. Walker to the Osborne Collection, 1976).

²⁶ According to the log books, Stretton appears to have confined her teaching to Sunday/Night School and a temporary post as governess with the well-respected Reverend Alexander McLaren, which she was apparently sorry to terminate ('my occupation is gone; I felt rather low', Log Book: 25.5.1866). An earlier decision to decline a position is recorded without explanation in an entry on 6.9.1861. The diaries indicate periodic difficulty in obtaining posts; in 1869 Stretton mentions, in a letter to her friend Mrs. Priestley, the unsettling effects of Lizzie being without a situation (Letter dated 2.10.1869, copy held at Shropshire Records and Research Centre, BS91v.f.). See also David Lloyd Last Will (Vol.1, Ch.7) regarding the fact that hundreds of people had daughters trying to obtain situations as governesses around 1862.

²⁷ Hesba D. Webb (1911, 125) suggests that 'the most devoted companionship of husband and wife was, in duration and completeness, not to be compared with the actually life-long attachment and comradeship which existed between the sisters'.

²⁸ Stretton's great-nephew, Captain Webb, describes her as 'pernickety', suggesting that she 'demanded much more from frail humans than one can possibly get' (1964, 15).

²⁹ Lecture topics included 'Positive Philosophy', with Stretton 'greatly amused' (Log Book: 15.3.1864). Stretton showed a particular interest in the work of the artist John Martin (as did Mrs. Henry Wood and Charlotte Bronte), alluding several times in the diaries to his apocalyptic paintings and borrowing the name for fictional characters.

³⁰ A reviewer of The Clives of Burcot suggested the autobiographical nature of the novel, basing his opinion on Stretton's warm and earnest engagement with the experiences of her central protagonist (The Standard, 30.8.1867). Particular episodes in the diaries are transposed directly to texts, and, as will emerge, Stretton's fiction does appear to provide a forum for the exploration of personal/philosophical ideas and attitudes.

³¹ The assertion, in Half Brothers (Ch.14), that religion '[does] not consist in the observance of forms' perhaps encapsulates her attitude. In 'Women's Work for Children' (1893, 11) she comments on the fact that denominations or sects do not matter in rescue work.

³² As, for example, in her treatment of Jews and Christians, Catholics and Protestants, Stundist and Orthodox believers. In texts such as In the Hollow of His Hand, Stretton, through the reflections of her protagonist, comments on the seeming inability of people to hold different views on religion, as they do on other matters (Ch.8).

³³ In this letter, Stretton laments Cromwell's failure to carry through a scheme for a 'United States of Europe'. Although declaring herself 'not a Gladstonite', she expresses support for Irish Home Rule, about which 'the people have spoken so plainly' (Letter to Mrs. Pattison [1886?], Ref. AL225, University of London Archives).

³⁴ Stretton mentions writing a lengthy article on the subject of the Revival (Log Book: 22.1.1862).

³⁵ The overlap of the mundane, or practical, and the spiritual in the diaries perhaps prefigures the juxtaposition of, and tensions between, the harshly concrete and transcendent in texts, with ambivalence echoed in the shifting emphases and alternating focus on, or pre-eminence of, the material and the spiritual.

³⁶ Stretton records attendance at a performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream on 22.9.1865, and of Boucicault's The Streets of London (28.3.1866). I discuss the latter play in Chapter 6 of this study, in connection with aspects of the relationship between melodrama, writing and social context.

³⁷ She describes the New Year party (2.1.1867), at which 'the best game was with a large basket hung upon a strong stick between two chairs, into which each of the gentlemen got, + tried to knock some slippers off the back of the chairs'.

³⁸ Although difficult to please, she consistently admired the preaching of Alexander McLaren and George MacDonald.

³⁹ In The Soul of Honour, an East End immigrant community celebrates the anniversary of freedom from slavery (Ch.20). In the early narrative The Children of Cloverley (1865), Stretton broaches the question of slavery against the backdrop of the Civil War. The idea of freedom as, after the 'primary necessities of food and raiment', 'the first and strongest want of human nature' is expressed by John Stuart Mill in relation to the subjection of women (1869/1991, 576). Stretton recognises different kinds of freedom, some contradictory; the walls of Dartmoor Prison which have seemed so oppressive from the outside to Roland, protagonist of Cobwebs and Cables, appear welcoming in comparison to the 'miserable and degrading freedom' in which, having run away from his crime, he is both an outcast and a prisoner of his own conscience (Ch.13). For his wife, it is the freedom to be alone, to belong to oneself, to think freely and not to be 'held down a captive' - 'in bondage' to a busy household and family - which is most desired (Ch.3).

⁴⁰ The diaries frequently contain such entries as 'Sara alone to the Wrekin'. Hesba Stretton perhaps subscribed to the idea proposed in Hester Morley's Promise that 'healthy exercise' can be more beneficial than attendance at a prayer meeting (Ch.32). Old Oliver (Alone in London, 1869), oppressed by the darkness of his city dwelling, yearns to 'be a-top of the Wrekin, seeing the sun set' (Ch.1). Stretton was protective of her favourite places of escape, recording, on 29.3.1861, the invasion of the Ercall by 'marauding plebeians worse than Goths, who perhaps did not throw orange peel about the ruined temples of Italy'. She also warns against taking people you like to places you like, apparently because of the effect on enjoyment of the place when the people concerned have 'died to us' (11.7.1867).

⁴¹ She records receiving a cheque from the 'Tract Society' for 'A Summer's Day on the Wrekin' in November 1863.

⁴² Stretton's description of prisoners as 'encaged and entrapped creatures', dressed in uniform prison 'garb' and exercising in confined courts evokes the scene depicted by Gustave Doré in his 'Newgate, Exercise Yard' (1872), reproduced in Treuherz, 1987, 68, Plate 58 (see Appendix IIa to this study).

⁴³ Stretton's views are constantly shifting, sometimes expressing impatience with London society; she writes: 'We detest London' (Log Book: 16.9.1867). The sisters did later decide to 'give the West End a chance', proposing to judge it merits against those of the country (13.3.1871); shortly thereafter Stretton logs their growing dislike of 'London ways' (27.5.1871). Captain Webb, however, refers to a comment from the diary in 1890 that she always enjoyed going about the City (Webb, 1964, 15).

⁴⁴ See Deborah Epstein Nord (1995) on the increasing attraction of these pursuits. It is difficult to gauge the exact nature and extent of Stretton's involvement in actual 'street' rescue, although, as I shall discuss, many visits to refuges and shelters are mentioned. It is tempting, particularly during the later years, to consider potentially autobiographical elements in her representation of the conditions, and attitudes of poverty workers, in the East End - as, for example, in The Soul of Honour (1898).

Characters/experiences may be drawn from accounts given by those with whom she was involved in her charity work, as well as from personal experience. In her journal (30.8.1864) she records being given interesting information about 'low houses' by an acquaintance; according to a Preface to The Lord's Pursebearers (1883), she later visited low lodging houses of the type depicted in that text.

⁴⁵ The name is spelled 'Phebe' in this text, but in Bede's Charity (1872) appears as 'Phocbe'.

⁴⁶ The situation of this accommodation did, however, entail for Lizzie a long walk to work through the forest. The fears associated with this passage through the forest eventually led the sisters to move, and may have inspired Stretton's depiction of Cassy's flight (see my discussion of Cassy, 1874, in Chapter 4.4 of this study).

⁴⁷ Diary entries, and the article 'A Provincial Post-Office' (1863), indicate that the charge of over-curiosity may have been well founded; undoubtedly the post-office staff were privy to all the intrigues, indiscretions and deceptions surrounding local love affairs and legal/financial scandals. As 'official confidants of the neighbourhood', they were 'acquainted with the leading events in the lives of most of the inhabitants' (All The Year Round, 28.2.1863). The substance of such confidences was to prove a useful source for her writing.

⁴⁸ Note, once again, the association of domesticity with moral virtue.

⁴⁹ Nancy Cutt draws on log book entries to speculate on various flirtations and potential relationships, for example, with the one of the Pearce brothers, and with Charles Wood (Cutt, 1979, 120; 126). Entries, however, are very ambiguous and non-committal, although the nature of Stretton's association with Charles Wood does invite some speculation.

⁵⁰ This metaphor of carriage-riding recurs throughout her writing, with varying implications (see, for example, David Lloyd's Last Will, The Storm of Life, Jessica).

⁵¹ Stretton is, perhaps, in the use of the inclusive pronoun, acknowledging her own failings in this respect.

⁵² These sewing gatherings of 'stiff' or 'stone-eyed' ladies made her, as M. Nancy Cutt discusses, express a wish that Dorcas had never existed (13.12.1860), or relief that Dorcas 'is dead for another year' (14.12.1860). The meetings did, however, provide material for her stories and articles, as in the case of 'The Lucky Leg' (1859) and, more sympathetically, 'The Blackburn Sewing Schools' (1863).

⁵³ The Woods were instrumental in securing publication of early texts such as The Clives of Burcot (1867) and Paul's Courtship (1867); Charles Wood also furnished her with reviews during her absence in France. The mutual interest (work and friendship) continued for several years, during which time Stretton wrote articles for The Argosy.

⁵⁴ The creation of the manipulative mother figure of The Clives of Burcot does, however, apparently precede the association with the Woods, suggesting a long-standing aversion or other models for the type.

⁵⁵ Certainly, the log books chart instances of dissatisfaction with employers or conditions of employment in relation to Lizzie's teaching posts (for example, during November 1867); the sacrificial lot of the governess is suggested in Enoch Roden's Training (1865), and, in Bede's Charity (1872), the absence of payment to governesses during the holidays is highlighted.

⁵⁶ As the log books show, Stretton travelled widely at home and abroad; she perhaps found, as suggested in the early 'The Postmaster's Daughter' (All The Year Round, 5.11.1859), that travel engenders a 'latitudinarian' outlook. Stretton spent time during 1866 and 1867 in France (where Lizzie was teaching, and which country they found 'half a century behind England', Log Book: 8.11.1866), impressions utilised in texts such as Left Alone, 1876). France provides the backdrop for other texts, including parts of The Doctor's Dilemma (1872). In her journal, Stretton charts her activities during a trip to Guernsey, drawing on this experience also for sections of the latter novel. She was prompted to write Max Kromer (1871) after witnessing, during a return journey from Switzerland through the upper valley of the Rhine, the sufferings of women and children who had recently been victims of the Siege of Strasbourg. An entire log book is devoted to her visit to Switzerland in 1875, suggesting further travel articles, and providing material for the setting of narratives such as Cobwebs and Cables. Captain Webb's notes on the later diaries mention additional trips to Europe, including Italy, and Stretton clearly draws on these experiences, and on particular perceptions of foreigners, in texts such as Half Brothers (1892). In The Doctor's Dilemma, the tendency for people to be wary of those who are different is recognised in the observation that 'the dislike of all insulated people against foreigners is natural enough' (Part 2, Ch.20).

⁵⁷ It may be significant that, following a life-long preoccupation with the injustice of aspects of women's social and legal standing, the last decades of her writing career and the apparent consolidation of certain 'advanced' views coincide with her involvement with a prominent London circle of radicals (see Chapter 7 of this study in relation to her collaboration on Russian-themed texts).

⁵⁸ Stretton does, however, take issue with the unequivocal evangelical stance taken by an acquaintance who maintained that no-one ever converted a non-believing spouse (25.10.1861).

⁵⁹ The eponymous Hester Morley, moving in middle-class circles, is shown to be constantly mindful of her position as the daughter of bookseller; her father is scorned by some as 'nothing more than a tradesman' (Ch.34). Hester at times mocks those who flaunt their status; she takes a pride in 'belonging quite to the working-class', in being 'no lady' (Ch.42), but the underlying insecurity is identifiable. This text illustrates complex attitudes to class which involve the tendency to conflate, and the imperative to separate, 'pure' poverty - which is 'not too bad in itself' and does not constitute 'inferiority' - from those poor conditions which are perceived as 'low', where one might be forced to associate with 'ignorant' or degraded people. Stretton's own dread of being looked down upon or regarded as a charity case can be detected in the transposition to the narrative of Hester Morley's Promise (Ch.43) of an episode, recorded in Stretton's journal (23.8.1864), in which the sisters are sent a parcel of clearly undesirable items of cast-off clothing by a member of the local community. The burning indignation, and enduring urge to expose such snobbery, are palpable in the fictional text, published nearly a decade after the incident.

⁶⁰ See Hesba Stretton's Will (copy held at Shropshire Records and Research Centre, Ref. BS91v.f.).

⁶¹ The fall, in 1892, of the empire of financial and property tycoon, Jabez Spencer Balfour, whose fortune had been amassed through exploitation of religious devotion and the temperance crusades, ruined many small investors in England (see David Rock, 1999). The increasing interest in speculative ventures, with the 'irresistible temptation' to pursue seemingly easy financial gain - to 'go up to the City in the morning worth £100,000, and to leave it at night worth £200,000, and the prospect of doing the same tomorrow' - is emphasised in Stretton's late nineteenth-century text The Soul of Honour (1898, Ch.9).

⁶² See, for example, George Eliot's use of words such as 'commonplace' and 'vulgar' in otherwise sympathetic portrayals.

⁶³ In the main, entries record only the fact of the visit, without detailing her experiences/responses. Stretton sometimes pronounces a Ragged School 'delightful'; on the occasion of a refuge visit (Log Book: 14.3.1870), she adds: 'a place we shall never forget'. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, in textual representations Stretton repeatedly struggles - sometimes resorting to over-emphasis/repetition - to impress upon the reader the magnitude of the plight of outcast figures.

⁶⁴ The situation of deprived children in Stretton's narratives is frequently set against an idyllic concept, or construction, of what childhood should be, drawing on the experiences of 'carefree play' which Stretton enjoyed with the 'cherished little nestlings' (Stretton, in G. Holden Pike, 1875, xiv) within her family. She thus, as well as recognising the contrasting material positions, engages with wider middle-class notions of childhood, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. On the other hand, reintegration is sometimes on a less idealistic model, particularly where it occurs in a working class setting, as subsequent chapters of this study will confirm.

⁶⁵ Such comments underline the belief that the personal dimension of charity, evidenced in some form of relationship between giver and receiver, should be maintained (as discussed, for example, by Deborah Epstein Nord, 1995, 219, in relation to social investigator Helen Bosanquet's foregrounding of the need for 'intercourse' between those who give and those who receive). Stretton herself underlines the importance of the 'close and intimate knowledge of each other between the giver and recipient of charity' which was possible in smaller institutions and personalised forms of giving/involvement (Stretton, 1893, 6). As the preface to *The Lord's Pursebearers* shows, Stretton abhorred the indiscriminate giving of alms, which, she stressed, only served to encourage begging and failed to address the real problem (see also Chapter 6.4 of this study). The narrator of *In Prison and Out* (1880) comments that 'it was much easier to take a penny out of the purse, drop it into his hand and pass on, with a feeling of satisfaction of at once getting rid of a painful object and of appeasing the conscience, which seemed about to demand that some remedy should be found for abject poverty like his' (Ch.14).

⁶⁶ Chapter 3 of this study will focus on cultural and textual representations of the child figure, and where appropriate, relate these issues to practical and factual aspects. In the present discussion of Stretton's personal writings, reference to her practical campaigning on the subject of Child Protection is pertinent. Unfortunately the last log book available for scrutiny is that which deals exclusively with Stretton's visit to Switzerland in 1875, and as discussed, the only evidence of entries regarding subsequent decades appears to be that contained in Captain Webb's commentary. According to Webb, there was no journal between 1875 and 1884; Stretton's resumption of the log book coincides with the high profile campaigns for a society, but Webb includes no mention of this until 1888, when he alludes to 'dishonesty at SPCC' and refers to his great-aunt as a founder member. For 1895, he notes merely that there had been trouble about the Society. To shed further light on this period, I have consulted secondary material, but have also utilised sources of Stretton's own writing such as contemporary newspapers and archive material relating to the LSPCC/NSPCC. In her letter to Mrs. Pattison [1886?], Stretton writes that 'every morning brings so much work at present I have put off writing to any friends as much as possible'. It seems likely that the 'work' referred to is related to the LSPCC project rather than to other writing, as she subsequently refers to the issue of mothers begging with babies, adding, 'we have drafted a bill for the Protection of Children, which, if passed, gives us the power to prevent it next winter'. She also mentions visits to the Shelter. For an account of the background to the LSPCC, see G.K. Behlmer (1988). Behlmer charts the campaigns leading up to the formation of the Society, referring to Hcsba Stretton's involvement and influence in its establishment. See also Appendix I to the present study for a summary of Stretton's own account.

⁶⁷ Although still living with her sister Lizzie, who died only shortly before Stretton in 1911, she laments the loss of other 'familiar faces'.

⁶⁸ The only female writers she includes are Rossetti and Barbault.

CHAPTER 2

PUBLISHERS, WRITERS, READERS AND RESPONSES

In locating the work of Hesba Stretton within its cultural context, questions of publishing environment, audience and reception are fundamental considerations - part of a process of dialogic interaction/negotiation between writer, reader, texts and context(s). The publishing context is at once specific and broad ranging, implicating both the apparent generic particularities of her work and the multiple, sometimes divergent, agendas operating - at both overt and hidden/unconscious levels - from the point of view of writer, publishers and readers. As a result of the success of books such as Jessica's First Prayer (1867) and Little Meg's Children (1868), historians and critics have situated Stretton's writing predominantly within the confines of juvenile evangelical fiction - and, more narrowly, of 'waif' literature. My study, whilst recognising and addressing the significance of these areas, demonstrates the deficiencies of such limited contextualisation.

Discussing the place of evangelical fiction and reward books in the evolution of children's publishing, and highlighting the difficulties inherent in the application of literary criticism, J.S. Bratton (1981) suggests, but problematises, the notion that these books can only be understood in relation to their publishing context. As Bratton (20) observes, the production of this literature is not subject to the relations/choices applicable to the novel, with sales figures not necessarily indicative of popularity (21).¹ At the same time, a scarcity of reader testimony redirects us to the texts in an attempt to assess possible effects (22). The hybridity of such texts, and the inherent tensions, render contextualisation a complex and illuminating issue; in the case of Hesba Stretton's writing, I would argue, it is essential not to imprison the work within a narrow context, or to circumscribe critical approaches. The generic interplay and discursive overlap within and outside her texts ensures that they are poised to burst the boundaries of accepted context, inviting us to explore the tensions in operation, and to speculate more freely about what lies below the surface. Investigation reveals that the

freedom denied to the reader of prize/reward texts in terms of choice is offered within the texts through more diffuse mechanisms than is generally acknowledged.

The complexity is intensified by Stretton's range, with full-length, sometimes three-volume novels existing alongside shorter, ostensibly child-oriented texts. Relevant factors are her commitment to writing for an adult secular market, the concomitant addressing of apparently separate audiences in terms of age and type of material, and the simultaneous overlap/blurring of distinctions between audiences, between adult and child literature across her work. An analysis must take into account conditions of production relating to evangelical publishing, children's literature, adult fiction and non-fiction, writing by women, serial and other forms, as well as the intersection of these areas and the conflicting/converging agendas within and between them.

In this section, I will investigate the various and intersecting facets of the market, identifying forces and pressures at work, and paying attention to Stretton's association with publishers, including The Religious Tract Society, Henry S. King and others. My study will examine aspects of the publication and reception of her novels, drawing on archive and diary material as well as broader contextual research. I will consider what is known of actual readers, and hypothesise regarding possible readership and response as suggested by historical/cultural circumstances and by textual material or address. The issues and areas identified here will be developed, and arguments illustrated, throughout my subsequent exploration of textual and contextual roles and relationships. It will become clear that multiple motivations and responses, together with insecure generic and publishing boundaries, generate polyvocality in texts viewed, according to received notions, as univocal and didactic.

2.1 Multiple motivations and intersecting agendas: women writers, writing for children, evangelical aims and audiences

In exploring the network of factors influencing circumstances of production, it is possible to commence at a variety of points and trace circular patterns of interaction. If we examine agendas relating to nineteenth-century developments in publishing, it is clear that these are bound up with social, cultural, educational and political trends and expediencies. Fears about the decline in religious belief/practices and concomitant secularisation, anxieties with regard to degenerating morality, instability of class

barriers and increasing social mobility are intertwined with developments in literacy and with changing concepts of childhood.² Also implicated in this web is the position of women - in the home, in society and in the literary market.

Robert Southey, as Catherine Judd reminds us, famously advised Charlotte Brontë that 'literature cannot be the business of a woman's life'. Despite the fact, however, that women undoubtedly did experience prejudice in the realm of publishing, it was during the nineteenth century that 'the female voice gained authority and dissemination' (Judd, 1995, 251-2). At the time of Hesba Stretton's entry into the field in the 1860s, novels by women were beginning to flood the market. The reviewer of Stretton's The Clives of Burcot (1867) declared it 'hard to keep pace with the lady novelists of the present day. Not only is their name legion, but the volumes which they give to the world succeed each other in such rapid succession that scarcely is judgment passed on one than another three volumes demand notice' (The Standard, 30.8.1867).³

Developments in the sphere of children's literature are intimately entwined with women's struggles to forge a place in the literary market. Writing for children constituted an 'acceptable' female literary activity, as it frequently centred on concerns of home and family. A respectable means of supplementing, or, in some cases, providing an income, it offered varying degrees of independence and an opportunity to escape, at least partially, from a conventional domestic routine. The shared subordination and convergence of interests between women and children, and the implications for children's literature, have been increasingly recognised. Writing about women's longstanding productivity in the literary market as writers for children, Julia Briggs (1989) identifies a common cause, and discusses the 'coincidence of timing' between women's entry into the profession and the significant expansion of publishing for children (223). Charting developments and connections in the field during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and exploring shifting educational, didactic and political agendas, Briggs cites Hesba Stretton as a possible exception to the prevailing tendency among evangelical writers, the majority of whom were women, to accept existing social structures (238-9). As Briggs demonstrates, the realm of children's or juvenile literature potentially afforded an outlet for various forms of subversion. My investigation confirms the extent to which Stretton's published writings constituted a vehicle for social and political projects, not only in terms of a critique of society's

treatment of the poor or outcast figure, but also of an interrogation of the position of women in general. Furthermore, in line with issues raised by Briggs (238) regarding the identification of connections between texts and lives, scrutiny of Stretton's diary suggests that texts function as a medium for both illustrating social expectations/privations and articulating the *personal* dissatisfactions which are bound up with gender constraints, and from which textual representations can be seen, at least in part, to derive.⁴ For Stretton, as an aspiring writer of adult novels, publishing for a younger market also provided a springboard for establishing a wider reputation within the literary establishment.⁵

Critics have paid increasing attention to the subject of cross-writing, exploring issues of separate child and adult markets, and of various forms of multiple agenda and address within/across texts.⁶ Mitzi Myers (1997), discussing concomitant careers and overlapping audiences in relation to Maria Edgeworth, also writes about the uniting of personal psychological needs and political projects (123). She raises questions about the way in which the romance conventions underpinning children's literary forms might lend themselves to reformist political aims (120), and stresses the importance of 'taking child-centred texts seriously *politically*, as reformist spaces intertextual with grown-up works and lives' (126). Such questions are particularly relevant to the work of Hesba Stretton, whose writing is situated at, or traverses, the boundary(ies) of what might be termed child, juvenile and adult literature (categories which in themselves are ambiguous, arbitrary and unstable), and whose work, across its generic range, has political implications.

The notion of woman as guardian of the home and family, as moral educator and spiritual guide, is enmeshed with wider cultural concerns, and, significantly, intersects with the agendas of the evangelical publishers, from the point of view of both authorial gender,⁷ and of the moral/maternal emphasis of texts. Engaging spiritually, morally and economically with the drive to educate, reform and 'improve' the population, societies such as The Religious Tract Society - a non-denominational organisation - published books destined for all ages of reader, producing fiction and non-fiction, educational/scientific texts as well as religious material. The 1860s witnessed substantial growth: the 35th Annual General Meeting (1864) reported that 'every year has witnessed an extension of the Society's operations' (RTS Minute Book, Additional

Papers). From the 1850s, periodicals such as the Leisure Hour and the Sunday at Home (the latter including material for a younger audience) formed part of an agenda to entertain, inform, and provide an alternative to mass literature deemed ‘pernicious’ and ‘sensational or worse’. They provided a source of material, as well as a testing ground from which many texts - including those of Hesba Stretton - graduated to book form.

The Minutes of Tract Society Committees afford an insight into intended audiences: the Society aimed to reach a range of classes, through differentiated reading matter or material which offered cross-class appeal. Editions suitable for prize/reward purposes could be directed at the Sunday, Ragged, National or, later, Board School pupil, more expensive texts or editions at the middle-class reader. Minutes refer to the suitability of books for ‘all classes’, sometimes adding ‘especially for the young’ (as in the case of Stretton’s Max Kromer (H8501, 24.1.1871)).⁸ They also refer to particular ‘classes’ of reader - the term ‘class’ being somewhat ambiguous, sometimes implying ‘category’, but frequently alluding overtly to social class. Whilst some texts were designed for ‘young educated girls’, others might be ‘adapted to every class of readers, but especially to the lower, such as that to which the principal persons of the story belong’. Stories were directed at those of ‘humble condition’ (whose conduct in Stretton’s The Fishers of Derby Haven, 1866, met with Committee approval), or those with ‘little advantage of education’; ‘working boys and Sunday scholars’ were targeted and numerous texts were produced specifically with the servant class in mind. Even where books were ostensibly directed at a young audience, religious publishers were attempting to reach not only children, but also parents/adults of the ‘lower-classes’ through them. Adults might share books and absorb ideas through the practice of reading to children, but increased literacy among younger family members meant that children were also likely to be reading to their elders. Furthermore, a narrative which might be ‘salutary’ or ‘uplifting’ for the poor could also have appeal for middle-class readers, extending awareness of material conditions beyond their own sphere,⁹ eliciting sympathy and charity, and encouraging mutually beneficial ‘good works’ in terms of the spiritual state of the giver and both body and soul of the recipient.¹⁰

Evangelical publishers increasingly walked a tightrope between the religious and the secular: Tract Society archives reveal contradictory agendas which simultaneously embraced and attempted to combat secularisation, exposing tensions between economic

and moral imperatives. Through their publications, they claimed to occupy ‘an important sphere in supplying.... moral and religious truth in this intellectual and reading age’ (RTS, 37th Annual Meeting, 4.12.1866). At the same time, as J.S. Bratton (1981, 156) observes, publishers were anxious to exploit the growth in the market for popular and sensation fiction. As early as 1859, Stretton herself had voiced, in ‘The Postmaster’s Daughter’, an awareness, gained through family experience, that ‘few persons care to buy [religious books], except to give away’ (38). Tract Society Minutes demonstrate, as the century progresses, a continued recognition of the need for ‘more modern books’ and material which might ‘enliven’ texts. No doubt the ‘adventures and dangers’ told with ‘vividness and interest’ which they identified in Stretton’s The Fishers of Derby Haven (1866) suited this requirement, as did, from a rather more subtle perspective, her portrayals of the underside of society.¹¹ At the same time, Minutes contain warnings against the inclusion of ‘sensational incidents’ or ‘matter not suitable for children’. Teaching must be ‘of the right kind’, with evangelical principles ‘fully interwoven into the narrative’.¹² Stretton’s texts were generally found to comply with criteria, but changes required by ‘Readers’ in respect of a number of her texts reflect religious imperatives, and demonstrate constraints/pressures on writers to meet the exigencies of publishers.¹³ Stretton complained that the editors were ‘extremely fussy’ (Log Book: 5.11.1866); she had already demonstrated her assertiveness by insisting, in response to demands that The Children of Cloverley (1865) be toned down, on seeing alterations before sale of copyright (Log Book: 2.10.1865).¹⁴ Quick to satirise aspects of the Church, she evidently touched a raw nerve with what they perceived as her ‘caricaturing’ of religion in David Lloyd’s Last Will (Log Book: 11.12.1868).¹⁵

During this period, nonetheless, evangelical publishers were engaging increasingly with commercial forces. With the extension of literacy and the widening of child audiences, they were alert to the financial potential of the rapidly expanding market for children’s literature.¹⁶ In September 1865, the minutes of the Copyright Sub-Committee especially directed the attention of the Editors to Children’s Books and Devotional Books, as ‘*among the most saleable issues of the society*’ (my italics). In 1869, highlighting a pressing need for original material, they reported a constant demand for shilling books for the young, which they were unable to satisfy.

2.2 Recovering readers, reconsidering responses

Whilst such sources provide evidence of the audiences for whom these books were ‘designed’, and might thus prompt assumptions about an actual readership, accurate identification of that readership is problematic. We can ascertain facts about the sale and distribution of texts, but it is more difficult to track ongoing dissemination, or to obtain more than fragmentary evidence about reading patterns and responses. Purchased predominantly for, and not by, readers, the books nevertheless found their way into countless homes - perhaps augmenting meagre collections¹⁷ - to be read, arguably, within and across families and generations, forming part of a common reading experience, and at the same time engaging with individual responses, interests, desires and needs.

Numerous factors of course point to the unusually wide and sustained popularity of texts such as Jessica’s First Prayer, Little Meg’s Children and Alone in London. Sales of Jessica were estimated at the time of Stretton’s death to be in the region of two million; originally planned to sell at sixpence or one shilling, it was, along with many of her books, issued in numerous editions.¹⁸ Large numbers of cheaper formats were produced. In 1886, a Tract Society announcement of a new cheap series, to include Stretton’s Pilgrim Street, contains a reference to the publication over the preceding four years, under ‘Cheap Reprints’, of well-known tales like Jessica at prices from a penny to threepence. Although figures for Stretton’s stories are not specified, overall sales for the period of 2,500,000 indicate the volume of such editions distributed (H8501). Texts show that by 1911, in addition to Jessica, Little Meg and Alone in London, stories such as Jessica’s Mother, Lost Gip, Cassy and No Place Like Home were all appearing in the Penny Series.¹⁹ Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and beyond, however, her books, including the earliest titles, continued to be published in a variety of sizes and editions, with many appearing in the Shilling ‘Gift’ series as well as more elaborate/costly formats. As Stretton herself records, by 1870 the story of Jessica had been made into lantern-slides; it later appeared as a ‘service of song’, a silent film was produced in 1909 and another version issued in 1921.²⁰

The publishers had expected Little Meg’s Children to ‘prove a most successful work, to sell at 1s. 6d.’ (H8501, 21.4.1868). They were not mistaken: by November 1868 sales

had already reached 10,000 (Log Book: 19.11.68), and in February 1869 Stretton received a cheque for £131. By summer 1869, another 14,000 had been sold (Log Book: 24.7.1869) and continuing popularity ensured the payment of considerable sums in royalties.²¹ An indication of early sales of other Stretton stories can be gleaned from textual advertisements, which, show, for example, that numbers of The King's Servants (first published 1873) had by 1877 reached thirty-six thousand, with Cassy (1874) at thirty thousand and The Storm of Life (1876) - commended for its beauty and pathos - at eleven thousand. By the following year, according to the sixty-first thousandth Lost Gip (first published 1873), these texts numbered forty-three, thirty-eight and twenty-one thousand respectively.

Dissemination was, of course, not confined to Britain. The Publication Books of H.S. King allude to a connection with the publishers Dodd and Mead in America, where a number of the titles issued by King also appeared.²² The Religious Tract Society produced and distributed literature not only at home but also in Europe, the Colonies and places of missionary activity world-wide. Society Minutes record early requests for French translations of Alone in London and Little Meg; by the time of Stretton's death, according to the RTS Quarterly Seed Time and Harvest, Jessica had been translated into at least 15 languages.²³ Their 1911 Memoir refers to the distribution by a lady in Budapest of between 200 and 300 copies, and cites the positive testimony of a Jewish woman in Beirut in 1903. In her diary, Stretton logs a meeting with a missionary and a 'black man from Liberia', who both knew her books (Log Book: 19.6.1871). The emphasis of commendations is inevitably selective, reflecting, in part, the religious interests of individuals/organisations, including publishers and church newspapers, anxious to register and transmit comments about the book's potential for achieving intended moral/spiritual ends, for making a 'beneficial impression'.²⁴ Nonetheless, Stretton's books were evidently popular as well as effective, remaining in print for many decades, and whilst the spiritual effectiveness is, undoubtedly, bound up with the appeal to the popular imagination, the popularity arguably serves far more than instrumental objectives.

Historians/critics have shown renewed interest in 'the response of the actual ordinary reader in history' (Jonathan Rose, 1995, 195);²⁵ first-hand evidence is, nonetheless, very limited. Inscriptions in Stretton texts show that they were being awarded as prizes from

the 1860s through to the early decades of the twentieth century, in Sunday and mainstream schools. The Religious Tract Society made grants to public libraries, and the accounts of Henry S. King indicate that copies were routinely distributed to a number of libraries at the time of publication. Sally Mitchell (1995, 142) cites the records of a free Library in the East End, used by poor and working-class women during the 1890s, which confirm the popularity of writers such as Stretton and Mrs. Henry Wood; in general, however, as Rose confirms, information on individual authors is scarce, and the isolation of class as a variable presents difficulties. Reader surveys constitute a further source, but despite attempts to secure a cross-section of opinion, problems of bias still obtain.²⁶

Edward Salmon's surveys of pupils' favourite authors and books, conducted during the 1880s, reveal Hesba Stretton as a popular author for girls, and Little Meg's Children as a favourite book.²⁷ Salmon (1886c, 515), concluding that girls' literature would be more successful if it were 'less goody-goody', observed that 'girls will tolerate preaching just as little as boys'; his summarised results suggest that Stretton's narratives were not viewed in this light. The survey registered girls' preference for 'a good stirring story, with a plot and some incident and adventures' (Rose, 1995, 201) - ingredients often perceived as less necessary for girls' reading. Arguably, for readers of Stretton's stories, the presence of such characteristics compensated for more negative considerations; certainly, publishers and reviewers recognised her ability to tell a story, noting, for example, in relation to Carola, that 'from first to last, the interest of the story never flags' (The Glasgow Herald). Boys no doubt read Stretton, but perhaps felt pressure from peers not to cite her books because of the perceived emotional (and by implication feminine) appeal.²⁸

Historians have mined works of autobiography for clues regarding reading matter; although studies include working-class writings, many such works reflect middle-class lives. Views appear polarised between those of contemporaries who shed tears over the tales, and others who found them nauseating. Autobiographers who recall the work of authors such as Stretton range from those who were impressed by the power of the sentimental portrayals, to writers who expressed distaste for the moral imperative and the unrealistic piety of certain protagonists.²⁹ Edith Nesbit - who apparently read the story to her maid - endorsed the 'pathetic simplicity' of Jessica (Moore, 1967, 107); she

was to draw extensively on Hesba Stretton's work, echoing themes and sometimes alluding to the books in ways which reflect their mythic status as encapsulations of 'waif' poverty - underlining, as Nesbit frequently does, the notion of fiction, rather than life, as the initial and defining experience. Yet the comments retrieved represent but a fraction of the readership; most are comparatively recent, drawn from late nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources, and relate predominantly to Jessica and Little Meg. What can we say of the response of the vast number of readers whose reactions have inevitably remained unrecorded, and the other textual features which may have made an impact? What can be surmised about the reaction to texts such as Cassy, Lost Gip, Carola and others - perhaps less popular than those very famous titles, but still published in large numbers?

Ongoing recovery of historical reader response may yet reveal more specific information about reactions to Stretton's writing. However, in line with the strong textual, as well as contextual, emphasis of my study, it is now pertinent to focus on the content and language of texts themselves, the readers arguably implied and the alternative subject positions potentially available. As Jonathan Rose (1995, 209) observes, we must be cautious of the assumption that we can ascertain the influence/effect of works simply by textual examination.³⁰ Nonetheless, allowing for the polyvalence of the text and the instability of reading responses, exploration of that text and its possible messages can expose at least the potential for diverse readings, which can be productively related to the wider context and circumstances of production.

2.3 Uncertain boundaries: adult-child, cross-class and cross-gendered audiences

Like Charles Dickens, who considered it not only unnecessary, but 'as great a mistake as can be made', Hesba Stretton resists the temptation to 'write down to any part of [the] audience' (Dickens to Wills, 12.10.1852, Lehmann (ed.), 1912, 87). Stretton's writing does not display condescension. Nor does it share the self-conscious tone or avoidance of serious issues and ideas often associated with literature for children.

Critics have dwelt at length on the problematics of defining children's literature, and the questions which might facilitate - or complicate - identification of a text's status in this respect; the possibility of establishing definitive boundaries is increasingly being called into question.³¹ Foster and Simons (1995, 8), suggest a 'less rigid division between

adult and youthful readerships' in the nineteenth century; I have suggested the particular difficulty of locating Stretton's books as specifically for children, or for a particular audience, whether in terms of targeted, implied or potential reader. Nonetheless, it is helpful to consider the matter in terms of some of the areas of distinction traditionally foregrounded, even if such issues are ultimately difficult to resolve.³² Clearly, a number of Stretton's texts centre on the experiences of child/juvenile protagonists, offering and engaging with a child's perspective and inviting identification or empathy. Children often figure prominently in the longer novels, but are less likely to be the central focalising character. It is clear from her diary that Stretton considered early texts submitted to the Tract Society as children's stories. However, the Society's 'Readers' identified The Children of Cloverley as likely to 'interest adults as well as the young' (H8501, 3.10.1865); the writer for the Sunday at Home (1911, 123) reported comments that Jessica was 'a child's book truly ... but its effect on sailors was marvellous', underlining the ambiguity surrounding generic/audience identification.³³ Stretton's writing consistently demands at least a reasonable level of literacy and comprehension; the reader is expected to understand/engage with mature concerns. In terms of syntactic and narrative simplicity, certain texts might be more likely to appeal, on the surface, to a younger or perhaps less sophisticated reader, whilst the semantic density and stylistic complexity of others necessarily point to an implied adult audience, highly competent in terms of literacy and abstract understanding. Many stories, including Bede's Charity, The King's Servants and Carola, occupy a more ambiguous position, for a variety of reasons, as will become clear in the course of this study; for some readers, such texts perhaps fulfilled a transitional role, functioning as stepping-stones on the path towards the full-length novels.

In terms of narrative voice and register, there is little obvious accommodation of the child reader. There is seldom an overt or intrusive narrator, or a consistently strong authorial presence; direct address to the reader is limited and often reflects a desire to impart factual information and raise consciousness rather than create an intimate narrator/narratee relationship.³⁴ The narration rarely exhibits a conspiratorial or maternal adult-child tone, a fact which tends to set Hesba Stretton apart from writers such as Mrs. Walton or Mrs. Molesworth, whose books, in varying degrees, are more easily recognisable as children's texts. The writing is not linguistically patronising;

Stretton addresses an intelligent reader and does not assume a position of superiority. I would suggest that the mode of address might be considered dual rather than double, in the sense that Stretton employs a tone of seriousness, sometimes with overtones of irony, but generally privileging context, story and ideas, over an overt consciousness of addressee. Importantly, she views child and adult (within the text and as reader) not as categories, but as human beings with rights, whose experiences and needs are significant - in short, as equally valid subjects and audiences. Such a stance contributes to what might be seen as a more 'open' form of address, offering shared access and engagement combined with different levels of interpretation. If the child's perspective is sometimes a naïve one in Stretton's texts, and if adults are being addressed over the shoulder of a potential child narratee, this often serves to emphasise the vulnerability of the child and to critique authority; it is seldom at the expense of the child, although there may be an implication of immaturity in the viewpoint of the young protagonist.³⁵

Overall, we can perhaps posit a continuum in terms of narrative complexity, with content, language and structure varying in intricacy. This is not chronological, although over time texts become less child-reader-friendly as disturbing and violent issues are recognised and confronted with increasing seriousness. Continuity/overlapping of preoccupations and themes is evident across the range. The emphasis on dialogue and incident, which is often a feature of children's literature, is blended, in varying proportions, with the more intense preoccupation with description and introspection associated with an implied adult audience. In terms of material/context, we can posit a blurring of boundaries and the likelihood of engagement by readers of diverse ages, with social issues and cultural/psychological subtexts, even in the earlier texts such as Fern's Hollow, Enoch Roden's Training, or (deceptively) simple narratives such as Jessica's First Prayer,³⁶ providing layered readings and the possibility of more nuanced cross-generational identification or attraction. My subsequent examination of textual representations and relationships reveals the proximity of Stretton's themes to issues which might be deemed more appropriate to adult audiences. Reporting on The King's Servants for the 'Christmas Books' section in 1873 (alongside texts such as Juliana Ewing's Lob Lie-By-the-Fire), the Athenaeum critic recognised that Stretton's name, as the author of 'that delightful little book, "Jessica's First Prayer"', would 'attract readers to anything she may write'. It was thus deemed all the more regrettable that the

unsuitability for immature minds of certain subject matter rendered the present text 'not a book we should put into the hands of young people' (13.12.1873).³⁷

Whilst the clear-cut moral schematisation deemed characteristic of many juvenile texts is apparent at one level, with polarisations of good and evil providing a framework and reinforced by linguistic binaries, this is consistently problematised. Furthermore, as I will establish, themes in Stretton's work double as displaced arenas for issues which transcend class, articulating unspoken fears surrounding abuse and violence, as well as tapping into cross-class insecurities and discontents and broaching issues deemed inappropriate for middle-class readers, whatever their age. Stretton does not shy away from engaging with the situation and emotions of male protagonists, young or old, and role reversals in respect of generation and gender feature prominently in her stories. At the same time, as will emerge strongly throughout my study, a preoccupation with the concerns of women, and with the shared marginality of women and children, contributes significantly to the cross-audenced nature of all her work. Overt comment often appears to be addressed to an implied female reader whose sympathies might be co-opted, but is, arguably, also directed at any reader who needs, regardless of age and gender, to be made aware of power/gender inequalities. The publishers' designation of Cobwebs and Cables as suitable for 'young men and others' is both called into question and justified by the multiple perspectives which the text offers; Stretton clearly engages, across the age range, with the female viewpoint. The problems facing the adult woman in Bede's Charity, The Storm of Life, A Thorny Path and many others are considered both in relation to, and apart from, the plight of the child - engaging, for example, with fears both of abandonment and of being the abandoner. In terms of the moral complexity often associated with adult texts, dilemmas may be more acute/complex in Stretton's longer texts. However, an acknowledgement of ambiguity permeates all her writing, whether it concerns the choice between integrity and obedience/loyalty to a parent, between conflicting legal, moral or emotional imperatives, between honesty and survival, or, as in A Thorny Path and others, between escape from/adherence to the duties of parenthood.³⁸

2.4 Messages, manipulation, multiple perspectives

Critics such as Kate Flint (1993), as noted earlier, have foregrounded the role of reading in the formation of the subject. My study draws attention to the part played by Stretton's writing in the construction of individual and group identities, and its interaction with personal and wider cultural assumptions, discourses and representations. As Lissa Paul (1998) argues in relation to the range of voices/positionalities offered by texts, interpretations depend on who is looking, when, and from what ideological vantage point (10). Power relations and subject positions within and between classes, together with the voice of the marginalised, both adult and child, will be examined in the context of representations and perceptions of such figures/groups, in Chapter 6. However, in discussing audiences, it is appropriate to address the issue of texts as sites of cultural manipulation incorporating discourses of control, and to suggest strategies which reproduce or challenge dominant value-systems, setting up or complicating preferred readings. Critics such as Peter Hollindale (1988) and John Stephens (1992) have highlighted the operation of ideology and power in children's literature, the construction of subject positions, and the reproduction, interrogation/subversion of dominant codes through narrative and linguistic processes.³⁹ Norman Fairclough (1989, 85), discussing language, power and the role of naturalised assumptions, points out, significantly, that 'ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible' - a recognition implicit in Victorian writer Samuel Green's praise of story-telling which incorporates 'deep but unobtrusive moral teaching' (Green, 1899, 79).

Shirley Foster and Judy Simons (1995, 9) write that, despite generic indeterminacy, certain features may suggest a specific audience, with children's writing implicated, arguably, to a greater extent in processes of enculturation. We can broaden this premise to associate the wider target audiences applicable to Stretton's work, and to its circumstances of production, with extended processes of social/cultural manipulation. Readers may be subordinate in power, if not in age. The child reader is potentially elided with the less educated or less sophisticated adult;⁴⁰ he/she is equated with the less 'spiritually-mature' or 'spiritually-literate' reader ('young' in faith), and with those 'untrained'/'unschooled' in civilised values, underlining processes of infantilisation in relation to class, education and race, as well as chronological age. The very notion of

books as rewards for appropriate behaviour highlights the coercive nature of the enterprise itself.⁴¹ Scrutiny of Tract Society language, as we have seen, exposes the use of terms implicated in processes of socialisation, with books designed to promote not only religious doctrines, but also dependent and overlapping cultural messages. Reports evidence the intention to 'teach valuable lessons to the young'; they highlight the perceived importance of promoting 'desirable' qualities and eliminating unwelcome traits ranging from procrastination to deadlier vices. For those both poor *and* young, the dangers of being surrounded by environmental evils and prey to 'vicious companionship' were singularly potent.⁴² Young girls in service, many of whom were, of course, like Stretton's Cassy, little more than children, were particular targets for moral guidance and instruction. Literature might function to 'root out' 'self-willed indulgence' or the 'evil passions' of the 'ignorant'; in the case of a regular author, Miss Giberne, it might be 'designed to inculcate a spirit of contentment with our lot'. As far as the publishers were concerned, the 'special object' of Stretton's The Children of Cloverley (3.10.1865, H8501) was to 'enforce submission' (to God's will, but, by extension, to forms of cultural authority). Words/phrases such as 'struggle', 'overcome', 'self-conquest/denial' and 'resistance' to 'temptation' or 'moral degradation', underpin the endorsement of books including Pilgrim Street and Little Meg. (H8501, 26.2.1867; 21.4.1868).⁴³ Readers of 'refined' classes were subject to similar attempts at enculturation through texts specifically directed at combating their 'worldly dissipation'; they could also indirectly take on board these darker messages, which formed part of wider - often gender-oriented - discourses of control, and were linked, in turn, with ideals of nationhood and civilisation.

As a consequence of such emphases, evangelical writers have been associated primarily with instruction and moralising, and denigrated - generally without detailed consideration of the contradictions and complexities of their work - by a modern critical establishment which has equated religion unequivocally with social control.⁴⁴ As Sally Mitchell (1995, 140) notes, readers of texts such as Jessica's First Prayer (viewed as a 'prime example of evangelical moralizing') have been presented as 'passive receptors brainwashed by Christian morals and gender texts'. Nevertheless, if Stretton's writing received contemporary approval from certain quarters precisely because of its evangelical or morally instructive qualities, I would also argue that what Mitchell (156)

terms 'the disjunction among implied reader, moral, and the tales' function' has wider implications than might be assumed at first sight, rendering the narratives much more ideologically uncertain.⁴⁵

If we consider Stretton's participation in discourses of control, it is, of course, clear that didactic and ideological agendas are operating in her writing, some chiming with the interests of evangelical publishers, others reflecting her own project, as in the case of her views on women's rights. Sometimes such agendas are in opposition. Inevitably, related linguistic issues are implicated; the extent to which Hesba Stretton's language and writing reinforces or questions received paradigms cannot escape scrutiny. Robin Melrose and Diana Gardner (1996), examining 'the language of control' in Victorian children's fiction, discuss both overt and insidious strategies of manipulation.⁴⁶ They note Stretton's use of characters to relay her message (145), with dialogue and narrative action harnessed for purposes of instruction, and suggest that, although her narratives include elements 'designed to capture a young audience', these are balanced or countermanded by factors 'designed to please the book-buying adult' (150).

I would agree that Stretton harnesses theme and character to convey personal, religious and social messages; we can recognise prevailing cultural expectations and moral attitudes which are reproduced by means of acts of instruction/warning encoded at various levels within, and activated by, the narrative. Such emphases may have been accentuated as a result of extra demands from publishers. On occasions, moral opinions are set down by the narrator as 'given', even though overt 'sermonising' is less readily identifiable than, for example, in the work of Kingsley. Bible quotations are sometimes included as a natural part of the narrative or dialogue, or added - almost as an afterthought, and perhaps as part of a revision - at the end of a chapter. Authorial judgement is implicit in statements such as 'Thus, sinful unbelief prevailed' (Enoch Roden's Training, Ch.7); chapter headings may serve as a form of instruction, with titles such as 'A Troubled Conscience' (A Thorny Path) underlining moral threads. There is overt didactic purpose of a different kind behind the preoccupation of the last chapter of this text, entitled 'A Shameful Verdict', where, as in many instances, the social critique is explicit and uncompromising. This is also the case, as we shall discover, with Stretton's bursts of 'feminist' polemic; cultural messages - conservative and progressive, overt and hidden - exist side by side.⁴⁷

A factor underestimated by Melrose and Gardner, and present even within the early Stretton text they examine, is the breadth and sometimes contradictory nature of the messages transmitted, with attempts at enculturation complicated by divergences between the views of author and publisher, or by authorial ambivalence/conflict. John Stephens (1992, 56) highlights the place of narrative point of view in the construction of subject positions and inscription of ideological assumptions, an issue which is particularly pertinent in view of its complexity in Stretton's work. At times we have a clear impression of authorial assent or condemnation - when, as Melrose and Gardner suggest, the narrator 'leaves us in no doubt as to the "rightness" and "wrongness" of a character's speech acts' (157). Such impressions are, however, not always instantaneous, but may rely upon reinforcement through accumulation and consistency, engaging with the expectations of a reader who has become familiar over time with Stretton's sympathies. Attitudes may consequently be subject to initial 'misinterpretation'; for example, a stance relayed (according to my reading) as part of an exposure of different, class-related, points of view may be perceived as underwriting class divisions.⁴⁸

Stretton's extended use of polyfocalisation, I would argue, serves to interrogate judgements, often raising questions rather than dictating solutions. Many stories are relayed by an omniscient third-person narrator; some of the longer novels take the form of a first-person narrative. However, the point of view is not always straightforward or stable; changing perspectives which reflect complex agendas and hybrid target audiences arguably generate open-endedness. Throughout Stretton's writing, we can identify a facility for entering imperceptibly into the consciousness of different characters. This serves to draw the reader into the thought processes and shifting opinions of protagonists, with authoritative judgement - endorsement or criticism - both implied and withdrawn. A simple example occurs in Carola (Ch.10), in which the narrator asserts, 'there was scarcely any end to the qualifications necessary in Philip's wife. It was simply impossible that he should marry a village schoolmistress'. At this point, Mrs. Arnold's thought processes are being explored (in this instance with overtones of sarcasm); only later - if the irony is not initially detected - will it become evident, as events/experiences modify attitudes, that such an opinion is flawed, if understandable. There are many instances in which the narrative stance merges with the

viewpoint of the character for long stretches, often without evident irony or implied judgement.⁴⁹

Such ambiguity might appear to pose difficulties in terms of how far an unsophisticated reader might recognise the intended stance. Pat Pinsent (1997, 26) writes that, faced with multiple voices and competing messages, children may also 'miss the condemnation of unsatisfactory attitudes which the author makes'.⁵⁰ Tensions between dogmatic and apparently conflicting/uncertain stances, and the possibility of selective or fragmented interpretation might, arguably, engender undesirable moral confusion. However, exposure of the instability of interpretative positions also highlights the complex and potentially interrogative nature of Stretton's address. M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 154) suggests that Stretton's stories bear 'too heavy a weight of religious moralizing' for today's reader. This view, as we have seen, appears to have been shared to some extent by an earlier audience. However, the notion of fluid and active reading positions throws simplistic assessment into question. Foster and Simons (1995, 8) note Elizabeth Sewell's recognition of the tendency for late nineteenth-century readers to overlook moral advice or religious messages, as, indeed she herself had done. Discussing more recent literature for children, Pinsent (1997, 50) suggests that readers often ignore Christian frameworks and elements of moral didacticism (50). Readers are actively involved in the process of making meaning; as Kate Flint (1993) emphasises, 'the same texts ... may elicit complicity or resistance' (40). Although the didactic emphasis of children's literature varies over time, we can always posit the possibility of reader-resistance to the direction of responses, and engagement with selected interest areas, ideological positions and cross-currents within the text.⁵¹

Narratives such as *Carola* (1884), which centre on adolescent protagonists, arguably position the reader as a developing (and tractable) young adult. However, not only do these narratives engage with a range of social and generational perspectives, but, in addition, the cultural moulding of the adolescent is undercut by the conflicting and liberating tendencies identified in Chapter 1 of my study. Margaret R. Higonnet (2000, 31), drawing on Perry Nodelman's suggestion that the activities of the unwise may be more appealing than those of the wise, points out that texts which appear didactic 'often function in the opposite direction, opening a window onto risk-taking, defiance ... and other activities that we normally inhibit'. As I will illustrate, cross-currents in Stretton's

work which actively invite the possibility of reading against the grain have the effect of disturbing didactic design, even though contemporary anxieties and attempts to direct the developing adult are identifiable. The unfamiliar, sordid, yet colourful aspects of the urban lifestyle of the 'romping and hoydenish' Carola have the potential to intrigue; the world of the circus, presented by Stretton in An Acrobat's Girlhood (1889) as a spectacle of movement, glitter and cheering crowds, may appear exhilaratingly free from conventional restraints - tantalisingly exotic, anarchic and 'other' - despite Stretton's exposure of merciless exploitation. Texts which offer glimpses of the unknown or forbidden are as likely to engage curiosity and stimulate interest as to encourage submission to regulatory demands.

In Stretton's narratives, the situation of the child figure, or the response of the child itself, is sometimes employed in the service of adult instruction, as in the exposure of Standring's hypocrisy (Jessica's First Prayer), where the third-person narration is not exclusively from the child's perspective, underlining the hybrid audience addressed.⁵² Such harnessing of the child character to highlight adult failings is identifiable in the exposure of neglect on the part of Jessica's mother (Jessica's First Prayer and Jessica's Mother). However, as exploration of mother-child relations reveals, both Jessica - and to an extent the narrator - alternately reject and support the mother, the narrative voice appears variously condemnatory and sympathetic; an appreciation of material circumstances and moral conflict serves to invite reflection. In many Stretton texts, the flawed process of interpreting motive and character is foregrounded; we are reminded, for example, in The Clives of Burcot, that facial features can be misread, identities can be multiple and precarious, viewpoints subjective and changing. The reader is ultimately informed, in a retrospective address reminiscent of Brontë's conclusion to Jane Eyre, that the narrator-protagonist scarcely recalls the feelings and convictions which influenced her youthful actions (Ch.58). Such a resolution may be read as a corrective to immature ideas; at the same time, awareness of the heroine's misprisions and misjudgements develops gradually - her uncertainties, insecure perceptions and changing priorities have, in the meantime, become our own.

In addition to shifting focalisation and unstable impressions of authorial empathy/endorsement, plurality of perspective may be afforded by changes of actual narrator. In her magazine stories, Stretton had utilised alternative voices in first-person narratives,

adopting, for example, a male persona ('No Bribery', 1869), or writing in diary form from the stance of a naïve but gradually maturing young female narrator ('Not to be taken for Granted', 1865), for the entire narrative. She was later to experiment with changes of narrator within individual texts, to suit various ends. For example, in Bede's Charity, an alternative first-person narrator breaks into a single account to particular effect, as I discuss in Chapter 6.5 of this study. The novel Half Brothers (1892), more clearly addressed to an adult audience, opens as a first-person narrative from the perspective of the young abandoned bride. Thereafter, narration continues in the third-person, with shifting focalisation, but the initial establishment of a personalised account by the woman whose relationship, birth-giving and death determine the course of the story, grants identity to her and forms a dialogue with subsequent perspectives/attitudes. In order to present different perceptions of events, Stretton juxtaposes third-person narration in Hester Morley's Promise with chapters written in epistolary form by protagonists. It is in The Doctor's Dilemma (1872), however, that Stretton most clearly articulates a strikingly modern appreciation of the instability of viewpoints, the impossibility of definitive accounts and the plurality of responses - an awareness which clearly informs all her writing. In this text, she again experiments with alternate viewpoints, utilising first-person male and female narrators to relay versions of events. In the concluding 'postscript' by her male narrator, Stretton directly identifies the fragmented, selective nature of memory, the unreliable emphasis of individual storytelling and the uneven and biased reception of messages and ideas. Her narrator-protagonist problematises any attempt to narrate events with 'fidelity', and emphasises that, in interpreting information, 'the brain receives but slightly second-hand impressions' (Part 3, Ch.27). For a particular individual, certain memories may dominate; for another, different aspects may be more vividly recalled and hold greater significance as 'leading and critical' experiences (Ch.27). I would argue that narrative strategies such as these, which actively promote a consciousness of instability, serve to facilitate interrogative subject positions.

2.5 Generic interplay: something for everyone

Fluid boundaries of class, gender and generation combine in Stretton's work with other areas of hybridity, contributing to the range of textual voices and positionalities. Maria Nikolajeva (1999, 66), discussing modern texts which address an ambivalent audience,

observes that generic eclecticism is more commonly associated with adult rather than children's literature, where there is an expectation of clear-cut generic features. In Stretton's work, multiple engagement and interpretation is facilitated by the complex interplay of generic characteristics, drawing on both psychological and historically-specific ingredients. Earlier discussion of publishing agendas has highlighted the tensions between the religious and the secular, which intersect with similar conflicts at social and personal levels. The emphasis of Stretton's early fiction is predominantly secular (although, like much nineteenth-century fiction, it revolves around religious principles deeply internalised/embedded in cultural consciousness). Subsequent stories display a religious emphasis, often incorporating disguised or displaced bible narratives/themes, such as the motifs of the 'Prodigal Son' (Enoch Roden's Training) and 'Dives and Lazarus' (The Soul of Honour), or engaging with well-known religious texts such as Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress (Cassy). This does not, however, greatly distance them from wider literary and cultural discourses, within which biblically-generated models, codes, binaries and symbolism have traditionally, if sometimes less recognisably, been inscribed.

If we consider the 'waif novel' as a genre in itself, close scrutiny of the 'waif' figure in relation to discourses of the child will confirm the relationship of this motif to the orphan as a trope in wider literary fiction, cultural discourses and social debates. Stretton's writing, as suggested, often assumes the character of overt social polemic of various kinds; as compelling and personalised narratives, her texts also contribute in more subtle ways to the wider project of social reform. Examination of her work foregrounds its interaction with social novels, and with contemporary debates/discourses in the areas of poverty, health, housing and legal/human rights - where fact and fiction can be seen to intermingle within and across overlapping fictive and non-fictive forms.

The category of evangelical social fiction may appear to stand in direct opposition to the genre of fairy tale or fantasy. However, there are many ways in which such antagonisms can be broken down.⁵³ We can, of course, identify the social intent embedded in the work of fantasists of the period; Stretton's work runs parallel to the evangelical/social fantasies of Kingsley and MacDonald, intersecting at numerous points, as we shall see. If Stretton's morally-/socially-grounded texts imply a rationality

which opposes the otherness of fantasy, there is, as J.S. Bratton (1981, 29) recognises, much that is 'other' in these stories.⁵⁴ On closer examination, interplay can be identified at various levels. Intermittently interwoven into Stretton's treatment of material conditions are familiar fairy-tale patterns and allusions, ranging from the wild wood or forest with its grasping boughs and menacing shapes and shadows, to motifs of Bluebeard, the wicked stepmother, the bountiful fairy godmother/ benefactress and the fur-wrapped matriarch suggestive of Hans Andersen's Snow Queen.⁵⁵ Such juxtapositions, as well as highlighting opposing moral forces common to both genres, permit responses which involve both reason and unconscious drives, blending the particular and the archetypal, and providing layered and nuanced address. The realms of fairy tale and religion, seen as distinct from each other, but, in fact, telling the same kind of stories about lives and relationships - and, indeed, requiring a similar suspension of disbelief - are thrown into relief. Differences and commonalities are accentuated, moreover, from several perspectives. Stretton's texts simultaneously suggest the strengths of faith over fairy-tale make-belief, and underline the providential 'if you believe it, it is so' (or 'will happen') quality of both, although fulfilment is necessarily less certain in the material world. By eliding these worlds, as, for example, in Jessica's perception of the church as 'fairy-land', Stretton's writing arguably serves to challenge as well as to reinforce the solidity of religious belief, unsettling boundaries.

Critics have recognised the influence of Romanticism and the links between secular romance or quest structures and the moral/evangelical tale; they have likewise noted the paradoxical relation of Tract Society or Reward stories to contemporary sensation/romantic fiction or melodrama, strands which will emerge as central in my exploration of textual/intertextual themes in Stretton's work.⁵⁶ If, as the narrator of Hester Morley's Promise observes, hearts may feed on 'fancies half religious and half romantic' (Ch.15), Stretton is not afraid to blend these aspects. Recognisable themes of melodrama lace her stories, from situations of pathos to dramatic shipwrecks, sexual misdemeanours and 'fallenness'; scheming fathers or lovers, fraud, bigamy and exchanges of identity abound. Her early magazine fiction is replete with the ingredients of sensation; the Athenaeum reviewer identified the novel Hester Morley's Promise as a 'complicated tale of passion', embracing 'an actual adultery and two attempts at murder' (6.9.1873). Unsurprisingly, traces of melodrama/sensation or 'flash[es] of the

grotesque' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch. 57) erupt to varying degrees into her wider fiction, where blazes, robberies, suicides and heroic rescues blend with her social project. If, as Mitchell (1995, 157) suggests, moral fiction speaks to the intelligence/conscience and melodrama operates through feelings, both are represented in Stretton's work, and, as will emerge strongly, the moral absolutes associated with conventional melodrama vie with moral and material complexities, rendering the writing more than formulaic. The connection is in fact multifaceted; throughout this study I will develop the theme, positing extended extra-textual links which embrace the blurring of fact and fiction and the deployment of melodrama within the area of social investigation and reportage, bringing us full-circle in the generic web.

2.6 Publishing relationships; critical acclaim

The subject of generic eclecticism, and in particular the area of popular secular fiction, provides an appropriate point to expand discussion of the critical reception of Hesba Stretton's work. Just as identification of the intertextual relationship between Stretton's forms of writing is instructive, so available reviews indicate contemporary perceptions of her calibre as a writer and highlight strands running through her texts, further illuminating her overall popularity. In whatever light Stretton's work came to be perceived and, to some extent, inappropriately compartmentalised, her reception as a contributor to journals and a writer of fiction for the adult market forms a significant reference point. At the same time, a more extensive examination of wider critical responses affords an opportunity to assess and contextualise publishing and business relations.

During the early 1860s Stretton's journals foreground what were to remain concomitant preoccupations.⁵⁷ They evidence her persistence in submitting and re-submitting, to numerous periodicals and with varying success, articles of serious journalism as well as light fiction. Entries chronicle her increasing success as a contributor to Dickens's periodicals, Household Words and All The Year Round,⁵⁸ and chart milestones in the simultaneous writing of her first full-length novel. The logging of remuneration received indicates her early engagement with the pecuniary aspects of her career, and presages a continued recognition of economic imperatives and the need to keep financial matters under close scrutiny.

Heralded as a 'New Novel by the Author of "The Travelling Post Office" in "Mugby Junction"',⁵⁹ The Clives of Burcot was the subject of numerous notices in the Pall Mall Gazette in early 1867, along with advertisements/reviews of fiction by Eliza Lynn Linton, Mrs. Henry Wood and Edmund Yates, and correspondence on books such as Eliot's Felix Holt.⁶⁰ At Christmas, writing her journal in France, Stretton notes the publication of 'Rhoda' (The Clives of Burcot), and in January records the receipt of reviews transmitted to her from England by Charles Wood. A number were extremely favourable and caused much excitement within the family. However, initial responses by critics, who might conceivably have been acquainted with the author, should, perhaps, be viewed with some scepticism. We can adopt the view expressed by George Eliot in her article 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1854) regarding the overblown 'journalistic approbation' accorded to many women's novels (quoted in Judd, 1995, 254). It is nevertheless instructive to consider some of the qualities and comparisons suggested by reviewers of Stretton's work, and to note a general consensus on her work as worthy, despite certain flaws, of serious literary consideration. The reviewer for the Observer (6.1.1867) charts the plot in detail, and, despite noting some overdraw of character and the perceived weakening effect of 'frequent feminine reflections', finds 'strength and power in the conceptions'. In contrast to the modern assessment of Stretton's three-volume novels, with their complicated plots, as a 'gruelling test of reader endurance' (Cutt, 1979, 146), the Observer's critic, like other contemporaries, found continuity undisturbed by the complexity of issues represented.⁶¹ The interest of the book was deemed 'unquestionable', and its likely status as a 'general favourite with the public' assured.

Unreserved approval was expressed the following week by the Morning Star's reviewer, and it was with apparent satisfaction that the author noted that the lengthy critique had 'gone the round of the Shropshire papers' (7.2.1867).⁶² This commentator, acclaiming Stretton's contribution to the Christmas number of All the Year Round as 'on a level with the best productions in that number', suggests that The Clives of Burcot placed her 'in the foremost rank of living authoresses'. Unlike other works reviewed, the book was marked by 'much force of dramatic character', reflecting a 'profound acquaintance with the springs and motives of human action'; the reviewer posits repeated - and favourable - resonances of Jane Eyre. The identification of Stretton's ability to combine

sympathy with the analytical faculty is key to the impact of her work as a whole, and the suggestion that the book resembles ‘a fine play produced by an able and conscientious manager’ seems apposite, given the ‘theatrical’ elements in her work.

In August the Standard advertised the production of a cheap (six-shilling) edition; a review appeared later in the month, identifying Hesba Stretton once again as the authoress of the ‘clever little story’ in All The Year Round. Stretton, deemed a ‘clever woman who has studied human nature in all its varied aspects’, is suggested as ‘the heroine of her own romance’. This time, she is criticised in passing for the improbable intricacies of the plot, but praised for her realistic portrayal of character and natural scenery, as well as her ability to draw the reader in. The reviewer notes the constituents of melodrama, and approves of Stretton’s representation of the complexities of relationship and self-realisation, which he judges to be effected without overt didacticism. Amongst the plethora of books by ‘lady-novelists’, The Clives of Burcot is singled out as ‘one of the soundest and healthiest novels of the season’, containing ‘finished pictures’ of which ‘George Eliot would have no need to be ashamed’. Whatever we might think today about such comparisons, it would be rash to dismiss them altogether. The same critics were not slow to proclaim other writers ‘dull’ and without interest.

If the Athenaeum review was, as Stretton records in her journal, only ‘tolerably favourable’ (15.1.1867), their critic’s reaction to Paul’s Courtship, published later that year, was, according to the diary, ‘bad’ (15.6.1867), as were two others.⁶³ Stretton, gratified that Sam Manning had found it ‘a most charming story’, records a ‘flattering’ critique in the London Review (Log Book: 3.6.1867). Her third full-length novel, David Lloyd’s Last Will, for which she initially received £50 when it appeared in the Leisure Hour (Log Book: 19.11.1868), apparently received two good reviews on publication as a volume, although Stretton omits to identify the sources (24.12.1869).

Stretton had commenced writing The Clives of Burcot and Paul’s Courtship during the early 1860s, but before securing publishers had already gravitated into the area of what she described as the ‘child’s story’. Her evangelical background and family connection with Sam Manning, Book Editor for The Religious Tract Society, rendered the Society’s book department a natural destination for this type of work. The Society’s

'Readers', who remarked upon the originality of her narratives, had also been swift to recognise writing 'far above the usual average of such works' (H 8501, 21.6.1864).⁶⁴ The first stories were published in book form, but just as Stretton's successful early writing had emerged in periodicals, so her most famous story was to appear in that medium, this time as a serial in the Sunday at Home. 'Numerous and urgent requests' were made for Jessica's First Prayer to be issued as a separate text (H8501, 4.12.1866); a similar response led to the publication in book form of Alone in London, which had been 'attracting much attention' as a serial and was 'highly recommended' (H8501, 17.8.1869).⁶⁵ The question of serial publication (in which format many of her stories continued to make their first appearance, both with the RTS and with other publishers) is of particular interest, not only in terms of the narrative drive encouraged by the form, but in relation to the sustained connection which it guaranteed between author and reader. The extended relationship with an audience over the duration of the career of a popular and prolific author is also significant, not only in terms of prolonged familiarity and identification, but in relation to the cumulative dissemination of ideas and values - the gradual sowing of political and social seeds.

By February 1867, when Pilgrim Street was recommended for publication, publishers were confidently using the phrase 'popular author' to describe her; whilst mindful of the potential of her books to 'do good' - Little Meg was 'thought even to exceed Jessica's First Prayer in pathos and power' - they were also becoming increasingly aware of the commercial potential of her work and of her consequent importance to the Society. The Committee were alert to the fact that by 1869 her books accounted for over one-third of new books, and in excess of one-fifth of their total circulation, such evident marketability highlighting the 'desirability of another book by her this Christmas'.⁶⁶

Emboldened by a growing confidence in her position and popularity as an author, Stretton had already begun to take charge of negotiations and to dictate her own terms within the male-dominated world of publishing, something she continued to do - unfettered by the legal constraints of matrimony - throughout her career.⁶⁷ She undoubtedly did play a part in expanding boundaries, although, as the Minutes show, there were occasions on which she was forced to concede conditions or accept a compromise. Stretton's own thoughts, as an independent-minded and assertive woman in all areas of her life, are undoubtedly mirrored in comments by the female writer-

protagonist of the later text Cobwebs and Cables (1881) who asserts in relation to her business dealings: 'I am a woman, and I will act for myself' (Ch.18).⁶⁸

The same protagonist - too 'original an artist not to feel how sacred a thing earnest and truthful work like hers was' - deploras the need to resort, against all her instincts as an author, to offering a manuscript 'as so much merchandise from house to house, selling it to the highest bidder' (Ch.19). This, however, was precisely what Stretton had done with the manuscript of Little Meg, although with more success than the fictional Felicità. The latter ingenuously admits to the second publisher that, writing for a living, she 'must get more money' than the first is prepared to pay - only to be dismissed as another little-known 'hopeful' who believes her work to be better than the hundreds of manuscripts submitted. By the time that Stretton was ready to approach publishers with Little Meg, she was aware of the consequences of having sold the copyright of Jessica outright for a very low initial sum,⁶⁹ and was determined to ensure that Little Meg would fare better.

During March 1868, declaring herself displeased with publishers in general and the Tract Society in particular, she logged, and signalled to Mr. Stevens of the Society, her intention to ask Mr. Wills (Dickens's sub-editor) for advice.⁷⁰ Whilst Stretton had regarded the sum of 30 guineas paid for Fern's Hollow a few years previously as 'capital pay', and had accepted sums of between 35 guineas and £50 for subsequent single-volume stories, she was by now acutely aware of the commercial potential of her stories.⁷¹ Indignant at the Society's present offer of only £50, and determined to ask 'so much a thousand for "Little Meg"' (Log Book: 28.3.1868), she prepared to engage battle with the male publishing establishment on her own terms. Her subsequent dealings, during which her hopes were alternately raised and dashed as she risked playing various publishers off against each other, are charted in unusual detail in her diary, and culminated in her somewhat reluctant acceptance of £6. 5s. for each subsequent thousand.⁷² Society Minutes confirm this outcome (and indicate a sum of £25 for the first thousand), but include a restriction on the period not mentioned in Stretton's diary.⁷³ Records show later agreements for texts such as Alone in London 'on the same scale of payment as "Little Meg"' (Copyright Sub-Committee Minutes, H8502, 16.12.1869) but testify to her continued efforts to stipulate her own terms - including an agreement of 'no limitation in time of the royalty' (H8502, 16.2.1871).

Other special conditions were requested, in line with her arrangement with the Scottish Temperance Society, but again Stretton apparently accepted a compromise.⁷⁴ A later agreement relating to Bede's Charity was arranged on 'the usual terms paid to Miss Stretton'.

The author's journal charts increasing contact with London publishers; her move to London in 1870, mirrored in the actions of the writer-protagonist of Cobwebs and Cables, doubtless reflected a similar need for 'easier communications'. She regularly took tea with numerous editors; on one occasion she met with nine, from whom she 'received homage' - a diary comment (16.9.1868) which, despite the ironic tone, suggests that whilst she found the meetings irksome, unlike her protagonist, Hesba Stretton rather enjoyed being feted. With characteristic ambivalence, Stretton both savoured and played down claims to glory, evidently gratified, during her stay in France, to find that everyone 'knows who we are' (Log Book: 16.3.1867). She expressed amusement at - but nonetheless put on record - her dentist's comparison of her fame to that of Lord Byron, and later revelled in the reaction of an embarrassed hotelier in Switzerland who had failed to recognise her until she was paid homage by a publisher (8.8.1875).

Despite referring to a disturbance with The Religious Tract Society as possibly her last, and receiving 'the cold shoulder' from the Mannings (Log Book: 27.5.1871), she nevertheless agreed to publish Max Kromer and Bede's Charity with the Society. Increasingly dissatisfied, however, she turned to other publishers, notably Henry S. King. Appreciating the importance of publicity, she was no doubt pleased to find that, unlike the Society, they were keen to advertise the number of books already published and to print the information on the title page. Perhaps she also envisaged fewer constraints on material, and more scope for her longer novels. A number of stories appeared in the associated journal The Day of Rest (and subsequently in The Sunday Magazine), but publication books and ledgers relating to King/Kegan Paul include references to her work from about 1872, when they took on publication of several two or three-volume works, including David Lloyd's Last Will, The Doctor's Dilemma and Hester Morley's Promise.⁷⁵ The 1870s also saw the publication in book form of numerous titles addressing a more uncertain audience, such as Lost Gip, The King's

Servants, Cassy and The Storm of Life, as well as shorter stories like Michel Lorio's Cross, A Man of his Word and specifically biblical works.

King/Kegan Paul archives reveal various types of agreement and terms, ranging from an arrangement where two-thirds of the profit passed to Stretton (resulting, for example, in a payment for the longer Hester Morley's Promise of just over £52 in 1874), to a straightforward royalty of 1d. in the shilling for editions of smaller books priced at 1s. 6d. or 2s. 6d. For Through a Needle's Eye, published in 1878 at twelve shillings for the two-volume edition, and subsequently issued in a six-shilling edition, Stretton negotiated a contract stipulating £75 for the first 750 nett, and £25 for every 250 additional copies of the work in the same form, 'C. Kegan Paul to incur all expenses'. In 1880 a new agreement was made for 'one shilling per copy on all sold of this text'. Records do not give a comprehensive picture; it is difficult to calculate overall remuneration, and many sales were effected at discounted prices. Royalties fluctuated, but accounts show regular amounts during the 1870s, continuing in the case of certain texts into the 1880s and 1890s, by which time only a small number were being sold each year. Sums of a few pounds representing royalties for David Lloyd's Last Will and Through a Needle's Eye continue to appear regularly until the end of the century and beyond.

Through her extensive connections within the field, Stretton was publishing with an increasing number of houses, in both periodical and volume form; new and existing stories were later produced as separate texts by firms such as Nisbet, Isbister and Hodder and Stoughton. By the 1880s Stretton had also re-established her connection with the RTS, who adopted titles published elsewhere, and issued novels such as Cobwebs and Cables (1881) and Carola (1884), as well as shorter volumes including No Place Like Home, Under the Old Roof, and bible-based texts such as The Sweet Story of Old (possibly the text listed as From Bethlehem to Olivet in the RTS archives). In 1885, according to Webb's account, she discovered that some of her books at the RTS were out of print, and not being reprinted. However, Society records show that during the early 1890s she was still receiving sums of £125 for the copyright of novels such as Half Brothers (1892) and other unspecified titles adopted by them - amounts far in excess of the general level of fees for copyright. By now, however, despite the fact that advertising reviews continued to suggest that she had 'lost none of her skill', her name

was appearing infrequently in the lists of new books under consideration by the Tract Society. Just as, in the 1880s Stretton had increasingly devoted her energies to issues of reform and child protection, in the last decade of the century she turned her attention to other social/political issues. As noted, she collaborated extensively during this period with prominent Russian émigrés in the writing of Russian-themed material including The Highway of Sorrow (1894), published by Cassell; additional stories such as In the Hollow of His Hand (1897) were taken up by the Society.

As royalties declined, an agreement had been reached with The RTS for the payment of a yearly sum of £250 per annum to cover books 'not the copyright of the Society'. Stretton, in fact, fared slightly better than she might have expected from the arrangement, since editors failed to realise until 1897 that this sum now exceeded the net profit. Despite hastily advocating regular reviews of similar royalty agreements, they were obliged to wait a further year before paying a revised sum (H8501, 12.1.1897). Once again - if inadvertently - Hesba Stretton had apparently gained an advantage over them. In 1898 the Executive Committee reported that an offer of £200 a year for Stretton's own life, or £150 for the joint lives of herself and her sister, had been proposed; minutes subsequently record her acceptance of the proposal of £200 a year for the next five years (H8501, May/June 1898).

Late texts such as The Soul of Honour, published by Isbister in 1898, were once again unambiguously for the mature reader. Seemingly, just as Stretton's development as a writer for children had paved the way for her wider projects, so her growing engagement with social and cultural debates and the increasingly serious and adult tone of her texts perhaps began to compromise her position as a continuing writer of children's fiction. During the latter decades of the century, names such as Amy Le Feuvre, E. Everett Green and Talbot Baines Reed were occupying an increasingly prominent place on RTS lists. With the continued expansion of the market for secular fiction in the field of juvenile literature, the popularity of adventure and school stories, and changing views of both the child and children's literature, Stretton's work was evidently less fashionable and less useful/saleable, even within the evangelical publishing establishment, whose own agendas were changing to take account of shifting moods/interests. By now, however, she had largely fulfilled her own personal and

political projects; she had exerted an influence within a male-dominated publishing establishment, and reached a wide reading public. Across the continuum of adult and children's literature she had articulated not only personal, but also wider psychological and cultural anxieties, and engaged creatively with prominent debates and discourses affecting all sections of society. Her high profile as a popular writer and campaigner had contributed to the establishment of programmes of reform; the titles and protagonists of her texts had become, and were to remain, household names.

¹ Such considerations are applicable to the field of children's literature as a whole (although, arguably, to a lesser degree in today's market), with adult choices implicated in the process of writing, criticism, publication, distribution and consumption.

² See my fuller discussion of concepts/discourses of childhood in Chapter 3 of this study.

³ Despite the reviewer's subsequent praise, such an opening highlights a process of classification by gender which in itself carries implicit value-judgements.

⁴ Such effects operate on the surface, through the perspective or agency of the child, and through metaphorical devices and juxtapositions.

⁵ Suzanne Rickard (1996, 227) writes of Stretton's 'double purpose' in establishing the trust of, and influence on, a wide audience, thus enabling her to promote a strong moral discourse and to invest in educational philanthropy. The constituents of such an agenda might, arguably, also be viewed in a reverse relationship, with the medium of literary social philanthropy providing a vehicle, and justification, for her wider agenda as popular fiction writer. In a world which has persistently devalued children's texts, her association with the child market - and with the realm of religious publishing/RTS 'label' - may in fact have served to limit audiences for her adult-oriented popular fiction.

⁶ See, for example, the collection of essays on 'cross-writing' in the special issue of *Children's Literature* 25 (1997). See also Barbara Wall (1991) and Sandra Beckett (ed.) (1999).

⁷ Records show that a large proportion of Tract Society writers were female. Notable male authors include G.E. Sargent and W.H. Kingston.

⁸ Subsequent general illustrative quotations are taken from RTS Executive Committee Minutes (H8501) or Sub-Committee Minutes - Copyright and Finance - (H8502).

⁹ Discussing the utilitarian and potentially humanising aspects of reading, Kate Flint (1993, 49) quotes George Eliot's reference to 'the extension of man's sympathies beyond the bounds of our personal lot'.

¹⁰ Cutt (1979, 146) comments that attempts to address two reading publics posed specific problems in terms of the necessity of ensuring that portrayals did not offend either side. This imperative, she suggests, contributed to idealisation, sentimentalisation, and, arguably, to the increasingly stereotypical narratives which abounded in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Cutt acknowledges that Stretton, writing before the establishment of such 'deadening conformity' had contrived to circumvent RTS regulations as far as possible and to find techniques of presenting 'realistic though limited' depictions of slum life (146).

¹¹ See my discussions of themes of sexuality, crime and vice in subsequent chapters.

¹² In 1865 attention was called to passages in the *Leisure Hour*, the RTS periodical aimed at a more adult readership, considered 'not in good taste'; 'more decidedly evangelical matter' was advocated.

¹³ All manuscripts or articles proposed for publication as books were read and reported on by two or more 'Readers', before being recommended for adoption. Alterations were required to *The Children of Cloverley* (Log Book: 2.10.1865); attention was drawn to a defect in *Pilgrim Street* after its original acceptance (RTS/H8501 and H8502, November 1867) and it was remitted to the editor for changes relating to the atonement; the report on *Little Meg's Children* stipulated an addition to the religious teaching (H8501, 21.4. 1868); *Max Kromer and Bede's Charity* would, it was decided, be 'in every way eligible for the Society's purpose' or 'quite up to the Society's requirements' after suggestions/additions (to evangelical principles) had been attended to (H8501, 24.1.1871; 20.2.1872).

During 1882, the text *Cobwebs and Cables* evidently provoked concern, as a proposal was put forward to withdraw it from circulation. No details are given about the nature of any complaint, but records show that, after careful discussion and opinion taking, the motion was lost (H8501, 3/10.1.1882). Perhaps, in line with previous reactions, disapproval stemmed from her determination to explore, rather than condemn outright, instances of immoral conduct. Or perhaps Stretton antagonised some with her exposure of the scramble for souls among evangelicals, with factions/infighting on the mission field. She refers, sardonically, to a 'park for hunting sinners in', drawing comparisons with an overcrowded vineyard where husbandmen pluck each other's plants and prune each other's vines (Ch.39).

¹⁴ She did, however, when presented with a cheque and transfer papers, together with a promise from RTS Editor Mr. Cross of 'very few alterations', feel 'obliged to sign' (Log Book: 4.10.1865). Likewise, determination to take the Society by storm over the issue of her brother-in-law's engravings for the text was thwarted by the editors' refusal to back down over the unsuitability of the artwork (Log Book: 23-28.2.1866).

¹⁵ When proofs arrived, Stretton found parts suppressed. She declared herself 'vexed' (Log Book: 7.12.1868). Although the story appeared in the *Leisure Hour*, Stretton arranged publication in volume form with Tubbs of Manchester, in conjunction with Sampson Low, Marston of London.

¹⁶ Whalley and Chester (1988, 127) identify the advent of compulsory education and the introduction of library services specifically for children as major factors fuelling the expansion of juvenile publishing. With the increasing demand for cheaper books for newly literate poor children, institutions like the RTS 'exerted a powerful influence on publishing programmes'.

¹⁷ Where books are scarce, readers may take advantage of the texts available, appropriating the contents in different ways. In his discussion of the reading habits of the working class, Edward Salmon (1886a, 116) commented on the tendency for people to read material which is readily to hand.

¹⁸ The sixty-thousandth Jessica appeared within about two years, the hundred-thousandth by approximately 1871, with numbers approaching four hundred thousand by the mid 1880s (White, 1984, 3-4). In addition to numbers acknowledged, numerous unauthorised editions were produced.

¹⁹ According to the 1911 Sunday at Home Memoir, the combined circulation of Little Meg and Alone in London reached three-quarters of a million. Jessica's Mother, the sequel to Jessica's First Prayer appeared in periodical form in 1867. A proposal for its issue as a separate volume was put forward in 1870, but was at this stage declined (RTS H8502, May/June). No reason was given, but the more sensational tone and content of the story may have been considered inappropriate. It did not appear in hardback until early in the twentieth century.

²⁰ Stretton's diary (3.6.1870) records her attendance at a Magic Lantern show which included 'the Jessica slides, some of which were very good'. The British Film Institute indicates that the 1909 film by Walturdaw, like many other silent films, has been lost/destroyed. The reissued 35mm version, by Seal Film Company, is contained in the National Film and Television Archive.

²¹ In March 1871 the Tract Society recorded a royalty payment of £273. 2s. 6d. in respect of this text (H8502). Other royalty sums listed are not text-specific.

²² Stretton was already publishing in America. Her diary for April 1870 refers to the publication there of A Sin and A Shame (a fact objected to by The Scottish Temperance League, who were simultaneously publishing this story). Stretton confirms receipt of her first remittances from Dodd and Mead in May 1871. The American Tract Society also published Stretton's work, as did other publishers in the United States, where some titles have remained in print until the present time, often in specialist editions. Stretton was awarded The American Tract Society Gold Medal for A Night and a Day (1876) (Friederichs, 1894, 331).

²³ In 1866, RTS Minutes (H8501) draw attention to a deficiency of children's books in Norway and Sweden, and recommend that translations of the Society's juvenile works should be printed. In Russia, by order of Tsar Alexander II, copies of Jessica were routinely placed in schools. This order was later revoked (Memoir, Sunday at Home, 1911).

²⁴ Assessments by commentators and newspapers such as the Watchman and Queen praise religious content, although the Non-Conformist also comments on the 'free' but 'compressed and masterly' character of the narrative of Cassy. The RTS writer Samuel Green (1899, 202) reports news from Asiatic Turkey that Jessica had been 'a great lesson of good to several girls'. The evangelical influence of Stretton's work was considered such that the writer of the Memoir for the Sunday at Home numbered her 'amongst the great company of women preachers' (1911, 123).

²⁵ Whilst demonstrating that it is possible to recover elements of this response, Rose (1995) highlights the problems involved in research and in the interpretation of findings. He suggests the benefits and drawbacks of library records and reader surveys, and points out limitations and potential for misinterpretation resulting from selectivity, outside influences/choices and class bias. For a gender-related discussion of reading habits, see also Kate Flint (1993). The later decades of the nineteenth century saw a preoccupation with reading habits and the effects of reading, as is borne out by the number of surveys conducted. Flint (162) confirms that contemporary interest - in relation to the habits of both the middle-class and working-class readers - was marked by anxieties regarding influence and corruption.

²⁶ Aware of the risk that research findings might be misrepresentative, Edward Salmon, in conducting his surveys of pupils' favourite authors and books, maintained that his research encompassed a range of classes, 'from the ordinary Board Schoolboy to the young collegian'. However, as Jonathan Rose points out, older working-class children were less likely to attend school (Rose, 1995, 196). Salmon also concluded that sales were influenced by the fact that books were chosen by adults as presents and prizes. As Anna Davin (2001, 69) recognises, actual waif children were probably the least likely to have access to these books.

²⁷ Salmon's table of girls' favourite authors (reproduced in Rose, 1995, 199) includes forty-eight writers. Charles Dickens has pride of place (with 355 nominations). Stretton appears in thirteenth position (27). This is below, for example, Charles Kingsley, Charlotte Yonge, Mrs. Henry Wood and George Eliot, but above Mrs. Walton, Louisa M. Alcott, Charlotte Bronte and Mrs. Gaskell. In his list of girls' favourite

books, which range from Kingsley's Westward Ho! in first place (34 nominations) to Carroll's Alice (1), the only Stretton text listed is Little Meg's Children, in fourteenth place (10), behind Mrs. Walton's A Peep Behind the Scenes and Yonge's The Daisy Chain, but above Eliot's Mill on the Floss and Mrs. Wood's East Lynne (Rose, 200). The eclectic nature of these lists highlights both the diversity of girls' reading experiences and the difficulty of drawing helpful conclusions. Stretton does not appear in the tables of boys' favourite authors/texts.

²⁸ The 1911 Memoir (The Sunday at Home) cites instances of 'grown men' weeping over some of Stretton's stories. Aspects of affective/emotional engagement will be explored more fully in the course of my study. Interestingly, Stretton, as narrator, voices the perception that girls live 'in a region of sentiment and feeling' (Cobwebs and Cables, Ch.5), and that 'most men shrink from any unusual exhibition of emotion' (Ch.18). This corresponds to the general debate on physiology and 'feminine natures' - discussions in which commentators such as G.H. Lewes participated (Flint, 1993, 55). Stretton's writing variously reproduces assumptions of women's greater susceptibility to emotion, and counteracts this view through her representations of practical/reasoning female protagonists. Bratton (1981, 23) suggests that emotional response is an important element in respect of less fluently literate readers; I would argue that we also need to broaden such considerations, recognising the cross-class nature of emotional engagement with these narratives, which may have formed a vital, if unacknowledged, part of the reading experience of boys as well as girls.

²⁹ In a letter to The Record (28.11.1867) Lord Shaftesbury declared Jessica's First Prayer unrivalled for its 'simplicity, pathos, and depth of Christian feeling', and noted the author's 'minute, and accurate, knowledge of that class, its wants, and its capabilities'. He identified it as the work of a woman, as 'no man on earth could have completed a page of it'. Without comment, Stretton records in her diary the appearance of the letter, noting on 13.12.1867: 'A letter from Lord Shaftesbury forwarded by the Tract Society, + a copy in his own hand of his letter to The Record'. The Reverend C.H. Spurgeon found Little Meg's Children 'equal to Jessica's First Prayer in simple pathos', adding 'What encomium can be higher? We confess to having gone upstairs for a dry handkerchief after reading this tale. The writer has the key of our heart' (quoted in Memoir, Seed Time and Harvest, December 1911). Yet the journalist Hulda Friederichs (1894, 332) found no trace of 'mawkishness' or 'weak sentimentality' in Stretton's books. Negative impressions are recorded by Lillian Faithfull (1924), quoted by Flint (1993, 221) regarding their moral didacticism. Appreciation of the 'heart-rending portrayals' is to be found in comments by Leonora Eyles (1953), quoted by Flint (1993, 222). Herbert Read (1947), quoted by Cutt (1979, 143), was struck by the 'grim pathos', but retained positive memories of the influence of Little Meg's Children. Samuel Green in The Story of the Religious Tract Society (1899, 79) recognises the role played by Stretton's texts in awakening interest in the condition of poor and outcast children; Suzanne Rickard (1996, 228) cites comments by a contact who had read Stretton's books in the 1940s regarding their influence on her appreciation of structural inequality, of poverty as part of the system, rather than the fault of the individual. Evidence of similar judgements is rare, but taken with textual analysis, would seem to indicate the propensity of her writing to participate creatively and constructively in socio-political debates.

³⁰ Jonathan Rose (1995, 209) criticises the so-called 'receptive fallacy'. At the same time, he highlights the unpredictability of reading processes. Lissa Paul (1998, 14) takes issue with New Critical stances on the subject of the 'Affective Fallacy', and stresses the productive nature of approaches which take into account affective responses. The fluid and pluralist critical framework she adopts for recognising multiple positionalities in texts is particularly useful. Sally Mitchell (1995), highlighting the relationship of reading to the unconscious, also recognises the multiple uses of texts such as these, with overlapping/conflicting functions for the same, and different readers (143).

³¹ See, for example, the essays collected in Sandra L. Beckett (ed.) (1999). U.C. Knoepfelmacher (1998, xiii), discussing the comparatively recent notion that categories should be separated, suggests that the serious study of children's literature has suffered as a result of the segregation. My study, although not ignoring the existence of differences, attempts to dissolve boundaries, and, as suggested in the Introduction to this study, to place children's literature within a continuum in which adult and children's literatures intersect and overlap, rather than as distinctly 'other' to adult works.

³² Barbara Wall (1991), exploring this problem, suggests certain characteristics and areas of distinction, and attempts to analyse the use/effects of single, double or dual address. See also Peter Hunt (1994). My discussion broadly follows considerations identified in these accounts, but recognises the problematic nature of particular designations. The notion of a 'dual audience' is frequently employed in general terms in discussions of 'cross-writing'; the idea of 'dual address' tends to suggest the ability of a writer to reach

out equally (although in different ways) to both child and adult audiences, whilst the phrase 'double address' may carry a suggestion of duplicity not implied in the term 'dual'.

³³ Narratives such as Silas Hocking's Chips were advertised as being likely to give pleasure to both young and old. Textual lists of works/editions by Stretton frequently show her work as general rather than children's stories (see, for example, new editions listed in a copy of Pilgrim Street, inscription 1890). The Day of Rest Annual (Strahan and Company), which includes Stretton's The Lord's Pursebearers, does not list this under the Children's Section in the Contents Table). Advertisements in the Sunday at Home for forthcoming inclusions do not list Under the Old Roof under titles/material for children, and textual advertisements for Carola appear with those relating to full-length novels. On the other hand, the 'Favourite' Gift Series (in about 1911) lists a number of Stretton titles, including texts as diverse as Jessica and Under the Old Roof as 'approved stories for Boys and Girls'. The anxiety of the Sunday Hours (1896, 164) interviewer to share insights into Stretton's girlhood 'with the girls, and boys too' links Stretton's work with younger readers.

³⁴ Occasionally, the narrator may prefix information with a direct address, such as 'I need not describe to you' (Fern's Hollow, Ch.6) or use a preface or footnote to intrude to similar effect, particularly when stressing the factual basis of narrative. In Alone in London (Ch.4), for example, a footnote, citing City Mission Reports as confirmation, assures readers that religious ignorance such as that displayed by Oliver is not exaggerated. Unlike Mrs. Castle Smith, who, in Froggy's Little Brother (1875), directly addresses 'my little readers' (and, at the conclusion of the text, their parents), Stretton does not generally address an identified reader. Strategies which address or co-opt the reader, creating the impression of dialogue - for example, the Bronte-like 'Reader, you ...', which occur in Stretton's early periodical fiction are less evident in later writing, although authorial intrusions occur in books of bible stories for children such as The Sweet Story of Old, and a variety of self-conscious, metafictional or alienating techniques are evident in her novels, as I shall discuss.

³⁵ Stretton, in using the voice of the child in order to critique society, does not mock the child's ignorance or naivety. Rather, she takes advantage of the interplay between immaturity/unawareness and accuracy of perception in order to show the world/society as it is, as this study will demonstrate in relation to child protagonists. When Cor (Bede's Charity) suggests that 'folks oughtn't to die o' thinness, ought they?' (Ch.8), he is starkly identifying a situation often couched in less clear terms by adults. The question of the appreciation by younger readers of Stretton's more pronounced use of irony - as, for example, in the case of Jessica's innocent critiques of authority, or the exposure of women's oppression and their unconscious internalisation of patriarchal norms, in texts such as Cassy (to be discussed in the course of this study) - poses difficulties. In considering this issue, I have drawn from the findings of J.D. Stahl (1990) in connection with potential contradictions/similarities between adult and child perceptions. In relation to the appropriation of sophisticated forms of literacy by younger or less sophisticated readers, Stahl observes that the identification of satire will, inevitably, depend on an individual's understanding of the world. He points to the combining of 'subjective and objective' forms, of 'naïve and sophisticated perceptions and means of expression' which 'fuse or intermingle just as the reader's and the writer's consciousness intermingle', and discusses the blending of adult irony with authentic child-like feeling/experience (120). I would argue that Stretton's use of the child's perspective as a 'satirical tool of alienation' (Stahl, 120) does potentially achieve an intermingling of adult-oriented critique and identification with the child's experience/viewpoint which limits authorial exploitation, but underlines social exploitation, of the child or vulnerable marginalised figure.

³⁶ The effect of texts such as Jessica and Little Meg, and, from a rather different perspective, slim volumes such as Michel Lorio's Cross and Left Alone, is one of crafted simplicity, contributing to their adult appeal. The latter texts, displaying the leanness and clarity associated with the classic short-story form, represent encapsulations of the human condition/relationships.

³⁷ Nor, according to the reviewer, was the 'terrible social problem' of rescuing 'fallen girls' to be 'made the subject of entertaining reading'. Compare this view with that of the writer Dinah Mulock that it was better for women to be 'brought face to face with "lost women" in fiction', rather than remain in ignorance (Mulock, 1858, quoted in Flint, 1993, 147). Edward Salmon (1886c, 524) felt that, in view of the 'unsuspected dangers' awaiting them, all girls should be acquainted with Mrs. Henry Wood's East Lynne. See also my discussion, in Chapter 4, of Stretton's treatment of sexual themes/motifs. The writer of an article on Sunday-School and Lending-Library literature (Church Quarterly Review, Vol.2, 1876), noting changing fashions in the content of literature, stressed that the fact of a book being in one or two volumes rather than three no longer guaranteed that it was a 'tale' and therefore 'innocent' (62).

³⁸ Lissa Paul (1998, 32), discussing alternative interpretative stances, writes of the response by one of her students to the story of Hansel and Gretel. Rather than identifying primarily with the children, the student

recognised in herself the fear of being the one who abandons, underlining the different ways in which readers engage with texts. In relation to the general exploration of different perspectives and the foregrounding of moral ambiguity, Stretton frequently seeks to examine the motivation behind actions and moral choices, going so far as to suggest, through the thoughts of the protagonist of Hester Morley's Promise (Ch.57), the idea that even the most heinous crimes are not unpardonable, not without extenuating circumstances.

³⁹ These critics pay particular attention to the political and social values embodied by texts at various levels - conscious and unconscious, reflecting a writer's explicit beliefs/didactic agendas and also unexamined or unconscious assumptions in which personal circumstances and a wider cultural climate of belief are implicated. The process of reading is recognised to constitute a complex interaction, with tensions and interplay between the various factors involving conscious and unconscious ideologies of both writer and reader. Hollindale (1988, 14) reiterates Pierre Macherey's assertion that 'the power of ideology is inscribed within the words, the rule-systems, and the codes which constitute the text'. John Stephens (1992) considers the different ways in which ideology operates and is inscribed within texts (56), through various literary/discursive strategies and effects. Throughout my study I will keep in focus ways in which ideological messages and tensions may be conveyed, interpreted and interrogated, both intra- and inter-textually. Attention will be paid to the use of language, images and subject positions available.

⁴⁰ Contemporary critics often grouped together books for 'children and the poor'. Charlotte Yonge judged it necessary to teach the poor *while* they were young as it was the only time they were within reach (1876, 97).

⁴¹ As Jacqueline Rose recognises, these forms of literature act as 'bribes' (Rose, 1994, 105). Interestingly, the offering of such bribes formed the subject of public discussion during the 1860s, as illustrated in the Observer on 14.1.1867. The writer of an article on this 'undesirable' practice, laid blame at the door, not of the instigating institutions, but of the child recipient, whom he regarded as a 'wretched little sham'.

⁴² See my later discussions of both Carola and of crime/juvenile delinquency in Stretton texts.

⁴³ Such language points to Foucauldian notions of networks of control which embrace not only agents of socialisation such as the Church, but include related practices/discourses of self-policing.

⁴⁴ Stretton has tended to receive a somewhat better press than many writers of evangelical stories. As noted in the Introduction to this study, it should be borne in mind that during the nineteenth-century the discourse of morality was in fact perceived as progressive rather than conservative (see Gertrude Himmelfarb, 1991, 8).

⁴⁵ In relation to the Victorian moral tale, Bratton suggests that, despite the potential for layered reading, 'the surface is more or less entirely covered by the author's moral and educational plan' (Bratton, 1981, 24). She recognises, however, that the extent to which elements other than this plan predominate is a major consideration, raising questions about the effects of tensions between the author's/publishers' didactic intentions and the layers within the texts.

⁴⁶ They discuss writers such as Kingsley, MacDonald and Molesworth; the analysis of Stretton's writing is limited to Enoch Roden's Training.

⁴⁷ In the early text Fern's Hollow, the narration clearly preaches duty, diligence and obedience to God's will, but simultaneously explores counter-arguments and moral ambiguity. Stretton takes issue with those who 'exercised great authority over the poor and used that power to oppress them and grind them down to the utmost' (Ch.4). She exposes exploitation by employers and landlords who pay low wages, charge high rents and ignore safety, highlighting the fact that the language of forgiveness and acceptance should not be advanced at the expense of critiquing social wrongs and class inequalities. If, in Enoch Roden's Training, Stretton is complicit in the agenda set out by the publishers with regard to submission to God's will (and, as Melrose and Gardner (1996, 150) observe, participates in contemporary discourses of self-help), this is not an unthinking, depoliticised acceptance, but one which is again juxtaposed with the exposure of social and sexual inequalities.

⁴⁸ In fact, although Melrose and Gardner suggest that the authorial moral stance is easily recognisable, the example cited (151) is one in which the cumulative narrative tone, as I interpret it, signals condemnation rather than endorsement of prevailing responses/prejudices. Suggesting Stretton's concern that characters should 'know their place', the writers use textual material from Enoch Roden's Training which I, in my subsequent examination of outcast society/class issues (Chapter 6 of this study), identify as a critique rather than a reinforcement of class attitudes. Other aspects of the text suggest the undesirability of division, and the need for rich and poor to be united. Such discrepancy of interpretation does reflect the potential for 'misreading', as shown up by Gillian Avery's (1965, 95-96) understanding of Stretton's

attitude (towards Jessica's attire) as endorsement rather than condemnation of class prejudice (Avery attributes to the author opinions relayed by the narrator from the perspective of a character). Across texts, Stretton's characters do occasionally voice an apparent endorsement of class position as ordained - for example, in *The Worth of A Baby*, although here the equation of the word 'station' with class may be dubious. However, the speech acts of other characters work to expose and contest such notions - see my discussion (Chapter 6.6) of a character's recognition of the harnessing of religion for purposes of social/cultural manipulation (*The Storm of Life*).

⁴⁹ Maria Nikolajeva (2002) explores narrative strategies which represent in different ways the consciousness of a character; her discussion of 'psychonarration', which involves the integration of omniscience, external focalisation and internal focalisation (180), can perhaps be related to the sometimes ambiguous effects of Stretton's technique. The problematical aspects, for 'readers whose sense of self is not quite established', of what might be seen as postmodern textual characteristics are suggested by Nikolajeva (2002, 186), who recognises the dangers facing the naïve reader who may fail to understand, for example, the use of fluctuating subjectivities or who may not identify covert ideologies. However, Nikolajeva also affirms the potential value of strategies which promote interrogation.

⁵⁰ Whether, as readers/critics, we disapprove of the attitudes, or of the condemnation of them, will, of course, depend on our own historical and ideological viewpoint, and experiences of life.

⁵¹ As Rose (1995) asserts, readers may resist cultural hegemony. In relation to the response of working-class readers of Dickens, he suggests that they were likely to extract a radical, rather than conservative lesson (208).

⁵² Mitchell (1995, 156) suggests that although a moral lesson is apparently directed at an implied male reader/protagonist, the narrative also functions to empower, as well as mould, the child protagonist, hence setting up empowering subject-positions for child readers. Recognition of the fallibility of adults also acts to privilege the status of the child, or, at least, contributes to a levelling effect.

⁵³ Mitzi Myers (1991, 98) has suggested the limitations of such binary assessments and the need to open up discussion, identifying common ground and interdependent issues.

⁵⁴ Bratton (1981, 29-30) recognises, within the moral tale, a 'separate world, to be entered free of the self'. Cutt (1979, 143), notes Herbert Read's identification of *Little Meg*, with its 'strange country' setting, as akin to a fairy tale, involving emotion and imagination.

⁵⁵ Allusions are both implied and overt, and serve to promote engagement with the reader's awareness of the motifs/models of fairy tale. As in traditional tales, children are, in numerous instances, neglected, abandoned or abused. Carriage-riding philanthropists/rich ladies often appear - or fail to act - in the capacity of benefactress or 'fairy godmother'; the attitude of the passing rich lady who, unlike her intervening counterparts 'in books', is oblivious to the plight of those destined for the workhouse is exposed in *Enoch Roden's Training*. The unfeeling superiority of the domineering Baroness in *Left Alone*, wrapped to the chin in furs as she drives her carriage beneath the gathering snow-clouds, suggests the iciness of the Snow Queen. The central protagonist of *The Doctor's Dilemma* (Part 3, Ch.19) speaks of the failure to 'meet the prince', 'find treasure' or 'make our fortunes', and in *David Lloyd's Last Will*, there are suggestions of 'riding in a fairy carriage through an enchanted region'. When the sick and starving protagonist of *In Prison and Out* suggests that 'it's just as if a wolf was gnawin' me', the striking evocation of physical deprivation is overlaid with resonances of the archetypal wolf image; the material and the mythical blend to intensify the impression (Ch.1). References may sometimes imply the kind of warning given by Charlotte Yonge (1876, 64-5), namely that an excess of 'impossible reality' leads to a 'morbid craving for excitement', and to demonstrate the dangers and disappointments of living in the realm of fantasy. At the same time, the use of fairy-tale motifs foregrounds the differences and the overlap between fairy tale, religion and material reality, on numerous occasions functioning to open up interrogative/critical stances.

⁵⁶ See Cutt (1979), Bratton (1981), Myers (1991) and Demers (1991). In relation to the reading of popular fiction, P.K. Gilbert (1997, 70) underlines the blurring of class boundaries, a factor relevant to an understanding of the breadth of Stretton's audience.

⁵⁷ In one 1866 entry, for example, Stretton records the publication of *The Clives of Burcot*, the receipt of £30 from Mr. Wills, and the appearance of *The Fishers of Derby Haven* (Log Book: 21.12.1866).

⁵⁸ My study considers Stretton's journalism from various perspectives, including the significance of intertextual motifs. For a discussion of a number of her articles, see Bratton (1979). Stretton's diaries refer to her regular contact with Dickens's sub-editor, William Henry Wills, and confirm her position as a sought-after contributor, particularly to the Christmas editions. Her relationship with Wills was generally good, but negotiations did not always run smoothly, perhaps reflecting what Captain Webb describes as her 'mercurial' views. Diaries record a number of instances where Stretton's immediate reaction was to

take offence or condemn acquaintances, but opinions were revised, sometimes more than once, within a short period of time.

⁵⁹ Published in All The Year Round, 1866. The Pall Mall Gazette on 1.2.1867 also carried a Notice for 'Maurice Craven's Madness' by Hesba Stretton, forthcoming in Temple Bar Magazine.

⁶⁰ Books advertised or discussed include Eliza Lynn Linton's Sowing the Wind, Ellen Wood's Lady Adelaide's Oath and Sir Cyrus of Stonycleft, and The Forlorn Hope by Edmund Yates.

⁶¹ Hulda Friederichs (1894, 331) marvelled at Stretton's ability to write a long story, with an intricate and difficult plot, in such a way that 'even the most careless reader need never lose a single thread'.

⁶² The reaction of Stretton's writer protagonist (Cobwebs and Cables, 1881) is worth noting: 'It had never occurred to her that local criticism was certain to follow the appearance of a local writer' (Ch. 8).

Stretton's Log Book records her response - and sensitivity - to both approval and criticism by members of the local community in respect of her work. For example, her pleasure at the appearance in the press of an extract from her article 'Aboard an Emigrant Ship' (1862) was marred by an acquaintance finding faults in its composition. She was peeved to receive 'cutting criticism' and to find her sense of the moral/immoral questioned by a particular friend, in relation to her well-travelled early story 'Alice Gilbert's Confession'. She makes the point that her brother-in-law, declaring 'Hang the immorality', judged it 'the best story I have written' (Log Book: April and May 1862).

⁶³ In fact, the Athenaeum reviewer found The Clives of Burcot to be the 'offspring of a bold imagination', in the main 'well written and ingeniously worked out' (12.1.1867). The same paper, however, found Paul's Courtship dull and foolish, and declined to recommend it (15.6.1867).

⁶⁴ The anonymous writer of an article in the Church Quarterly Review (Vol.2, 1876), deemed 'poor people and children's literature' generally 'only at the utmost second or third-rate' and, like A. Strahan in the Contemporary Review (Vol.26) in 1875, urged that standards be raised. However, he considered Little Meg's Children to be an excellent example of the 'very popular' street Arab genre (liable, like Froggy's Little Brother to 'dissolve' an entire class or 'mothers' meeting' into tears), and also praised Stretton's Bede's Charity as 'better reading' than many other texts which were in effect poor novels with a 'dash of daily services ...'.

⁶⁵ Laurel Brake (1997, 56) makes the point that periodical serials could act as 'trailers' to authors' works, creating anticipation in their readers, who might go on to buy them in volume form.

⁶⁶ A note added to the Minutes of the RTS Joint Sub-Committee for 15.7.1869 (H8502), when Alone in London was recommended for publication, stresses that 'the prominent fact in connection with the Books is - the large proportion of Hesba Stretton's'. The circulation figures set out in the note reveal that Stretton's books accounted for 122,162, 'leaving 446,218 for all the rest'; of new books, they accounted for 28,228, 'leaving only 55,436... for the other 22'.

⁶⁷ Critics such as Cutt (1979), Bratton (1981) and Rickard (1996) have discussed Stretton's dealings with her publishers. Suzanne Rickard has located Hesba Stretton's publishing relations in the context of a growing acknowledgement that, contrary to received wisdom, a number of nineteenth-century women exercised control over their business affairs, negotiating with publishers on their own account. Rickard highlights the boundary-crossing nature of Stretton's actions in terms of propriety and gender.

⁶⁸ Although we should be cautious of making connections, Cobwebs and Cables perhaps affords further glimpses into (or inversions of) Stretton's own experiences, or those of contemporaries, in relation to the world of publishing. The comments offered through the medium of her protagonist - apparently incorporating a mixture of seriousness and satire aimed at both writer and publisher - may represent an amalgam of her successes, rejections and responses. The character's experiences point up some of the problems of writing for a living: although the £50 paid for her first book might appear sufficient to a well-off woman, it is 'too small - as the result of many weeks of labour, by which she and her children were to be fed'. Her heart sinks at the thought that, if her work is worth no more, 'she must write at least six such books in a year, and every year!' (Ch.19). The protagonist's emergence as a comfortable, well-paid writer, challenging the scorn of publishers who 'laughed ... at the idea that she could gain a maintenance by literature', and the assessment of her books as 'clever, though cynical and captious', but with 'passages of pathos and beauty which insured a fair amount of favour' suggests a mixture of truth and irony. Does it reflect pragmatism or a genuine belief in the superiority of Stretton's own creations? The juxtaposition of satire, apparent self-mockery and ostensibly serious messages - creating a form of double/multiple or ambivalent address - is also to be found in her somewhat self-conscious treatment of novel-reading, as I demonstrate in relation to Cassy in my exploration of gender issues (Chapter 5).

⁶⁹ In relation to the question of the reprinting in separate form of articles from periodicals, RTS Sub-Committee Minutes in 1865 specified that the receipt of payment for these should expressly state that the transference of copyright of manuscripts included their issue in separate form by the Society at its

discretion. Stretton received additional small payments following the initial success of Jessica's First Prayer (for example, £5 in late 1866, following adoption in separate form, and £10 agreed by the Joint Sub-Committee in January 1868 as a result of large sales. In 1873, when the book was once again proposed for reprint, the Tract Society, in view of the 'very large sale' realised, ordered payment of a bonus of £200 on that, and other successful works for which she had only received 'ordinary payment' (H8502, Finance Sub-Committee, 17.7.1873).

⁷⁰ By the late 1860s her diary records increasing frustration with the world of publishing; after an altercation with Edmund Routledge, she declared that all men, especially publishers, were cheats. Stretton quickly saw through Routledge's attempt to limit to £10 the payment for a sizeable manuscript. Her swift rejection resulted in an immediate increase to the £1 per page demanded (Log Book: 14.3.1868). The matter of advice, if any, received from Mr. Wills is not recorded.

⁷¹ The success of Jessica's First Prayer had not been fully apparent at the time of the Society's adoption of Pilgrim Street in 1867. Society Records show an extra payment for Pilgrim Street in Spring 1868.

⁷² The saga of her negotiations is by now well documented, but it is important to summarise it. Stretton's demand on 23.4.1868 that the RTS should send the manuscript to Nisbet's was followed on 24.4.1868 by an offer - repeated next day - from Dr. Davis of the Society for £25 for the first 1000, plus £10 per thousand thereafter. Amazed, Stretton retrieved the manuscript from Nisbet's (who affably conveyed their disappointment and requested another similar story), only to be told a few days later that the Society's offer was a mistake. Sam Manning of the Tract Society wrote to her, offering £5 per thousand, but it was only after Stretton had received an offer of 4 guineas per thousand, sight unseen, from Houlston and Wright that Dr. Davis increased the Society's offer to the £6. 5s. ultimately agreed. Stretton perceived this as only a partial victory: 'I suppose we must take it.' This was just one of a series of worries she recorded on 30th April, along with the arrival of bonnets 'which would not go on our head', and the discovery that 'several things had been stolen out of a hamper' (Log Book 23.4.1868 to 30.4.1868).

⁷³ According to Society Minutes, the £6. 5s. per thousand agreed would apply 'during Ten years after which time the copyright to be wholly the property of the Society' (H8502, Copyright Sub-Committee, 21.5.1868).

⁷⁴ During negotiations in respect of Max Kromer, which was accepted for publication in the Leisure Hour and for subsequent issue (subject to a separate report and approval) as a separate volume, Stretton's request for new terms is minuted. The Secretary read from Stretton's letter of the 30.11.1870 to the effect that she wished, in addition, to receive £25 for the first thousand, and for the numbers of each thousand copies to be printed on the title page. After interview, she apparently no longer insisted on these two conditions as she was to receive £25 for publication in the Periodical, and, according to the Minutes, giving the number of editions was 'wholly alien to the practice of the Society'. She agreed that at the end of ten years, the Society could publish a cheap edition, with a proportional reduction to herself (H8502, Copyright Sub-Committee, 16.2.1871).

⁷⁵ Reviews for The Doctor's Dilemma and Hester Morley's Promise appeared in the Athenaeum, under 'Novels of the Week', during February and September 1873 respectively. The critic, surprised that The Doctor's Dilemma had been reviewed in America before it came under scrutiny in England, judged this to be the best novel of the week, possessing 'a good deal of life'. He detected 'a certain imitation of the manner of Mr. Wilkie Collins', but asserted that in descriptive writing, the authoress must be given a high place. (15.2.1873). The Athenaeum critic who reviewed Hester Morley's Promise (6.9.1873), despite finding that not all parts were of equal merit, with some characters 'coarsely drawn', assessed Stretton as 'a writer of purity and skill', possessing 'an eye for the subtle influences which go to mould [character]'.

PART II:

***ROLES, REPRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL
RELATIONS***

CHAPTER 3

THE CHILD: TEXT, CONTEXT AND INTERTEXT

In considering aspects of Hesba Stretton's life, I have highlighted her complex involvement, at various levels, with the concerns of children, and have pointed to the recurring textual motif of the child - particularly the lost or abandoned child - across social categories and situations. Intersecting with personal, psychological and wider cultural preoccupations, these textual representations operate within what Mitzi Myers (1995, 3) identifies as a 'complex web of power relationships and signifying practices'. Stretton's project encompasses material childhood experience; at the same time it is caught up within a network of symbolic images and culturally/politically influenced concepts. Poised between a nostalgic vision, and a potentially ambitious, if ambiguous, reclamation of the child figure, her work intervenes and mediates within a multifaceted discourse, illuminating confusions and paradoxes. Importantly, her narratives illustrate not only the multiple otherness of the child, but also the intersection of that otherness with diverse facets of a wider network of difference in which it is entangled.

3.1 Images and discourses of the child and childhood

Historians and literary critics alike, whilst acknowledging transhistorical and transcultural continuities, have drawn attention to the constructed and shifting nature of images and definitions of childhood. Concepts of, and attitudes to 'the child' are recognised as both diachronically and synchronically unstable, culturally and historically dependent - shaped, at least in part, in relation to the preoccupations and anxieties of society at particular moments and in particular material circumstances. Ideas and constructions of childhood, bound up with concepts of the family, reflect societal change and at the same time are enlisted to serve political and emotional or psychological ends. As Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (drawing on Philippe Ariès's classic account) observes, ideas of family and childhood 'function within cultural and social frameworks as carriers of changeable social, moral, and ethical values and motives'

(Lesnik-Oberstein, 1999, 17).¹ Concurring that 'what a "child" is' changes to suit particular needs and circumstances, James Kincaid (1992, 5), in his controversial analysis of 'child-loving', contends that a child 'is not, in itself, anything'; childhood can be created as a hollow category, 'able to be filled up with anyone's overflowing emotions, not least overflowing passion' (12).

It is clear, in fact, that the state of childhood is simultaneously marginalised and valorised, disenfranchised and empowered. The idea of the child is necessarily fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, it is constructed as 'other' to the adult; yet, the adult self can never really be separated from the child that the adult once was. Childhood and the child-figure are harnessed in complex ways as repositories for individual and wider cultural yearnings, representing that which is prized and lost, and, at the same time, a locus of future possibility.²

If the child represents in one sense the 'self', or at least a part of that continuum in which versions of 'self' are implicated, the child-figure is also created and exploited to represent multiple facets of otherness - to serve as the object, embodiment or projection of personal/cultural fears and fantasies.³ Furthermore, different kinds of childhood are constructed in relation to each other, shattering unified notions of the universal child - notions which, nonetheless, persist in the face of conflicting paradigms, and continue to underpin mythologies. Both between and within classes, various configurations of 'otherness' can be seen to operate, exposing common fears and the perpetual need to construct difference. All these antagonisms and ambiguities have implications for the representation of the child, and are inherent in the complex web of values and desires invested in, and perpetuated through, literature for the child. Beliefs are reflected and shaped through representations of all kinds; literary paradigms participate in the wider construction of childhood mythologies, influencing childhood self-definition and the formation of adult subjectivity.

Childhood, Mitzi Myers (1995, 3) suggests, is read as simultaneously an 'unspecified abstraction and the name of (or sign for) an apprehensible entity'. The notion of a 'real', in the sense of 'knowable', child is problematic; yet, obviously, children do exist as social beings. They live, as Carolyn Steedman (1995, 97) concurs, 'in social worlds and networks of social and economic relationships, as well as in the adult imagination';

in the material world, however, children have consistently less voice than might be supposed from the prominence of, and society's investment in, their symbolic image. Some histories seek to locate the 'authentic' child, and to focus on lived childhood 'experience'; certain representations purport to reproduce that authentic child.⁴ Accounts such as that by Hugh Cunningham (1991) explore the relationship between historical circumstances and representations of childhood. Certainly, to make a clear distinction between 'experience' and 'representation' is also problematic; image and reality can never be entirely separated. Concrete experiences in part determine representations and responses, but at the same time they are bound up with, and to a significant extent determined by, abstract ideas and cultural/ideological constructions. Identities and social relationships are constituted through discourse; images circulate to influence both self-perception and the perceptions of others, shaping attitudes and actions and thereby impinging on behaviour and material experience. We can perhaps posit the notion of a hybrid child, both in 'reality' and representation.

Critical opinion has varied with regard to the precise historical moment which marked the appearance of modern ideas of childhood as a distinct period or category. However, the nineteenth century is generally recognised as the era during which such notions took hold with a particular force, for a variety of cultural and political reasons. As Penny Brown (1993, 1) notes, the child became the focus of unprecedented attention, reflecting an interweaving of material/demographic importance and symbolic significance. Literary and artistic movements had already harnessed images of the child; during the nineteenth century, themes of childhood and the individual child became increasingly popular.⁵ If we examine the particular complexity and fluidity of Victorian images of childhood, we can identify a variety of concepts, each intersecting with individual desires, memories and experiences. As will emerge, these concepts are, in turn, enmeshed with wider discourses which reflect concerns of gender, class, race and empire; images collide and converge, as part of a process of constant re-interpretation and redefinition. The work of Hesba Stretton provides us with a particular arena for the examining the intersection and coalescence of these diverse concepts of, and ideas about, the child.

In examining this web, it is pertinent to consider what might, in general terms, be deemed the defining characteristics of childhood, and to foreground the factors which

condition these perceptions. The state of childhood is, broadly speaking, accepted as one of dependency on/attachment to adult figures; it is associated with a peculiar vulnerability, a relative lack of power (although, as we shall see, child power may take various forms), and an openness to enculturation.⁶ Dominant perceptions are measured in terms of notions of what childhood *should* be. Such ideals largely reflect a white, middle-class perspective, but at the same time are based on assumptions about the nature of middle-class childhood which may not be characteristic of lived experience. If we examine Stretton's representations of childhood, we find the existence, or co-existence, of particular components both reinforced and complicated.

Peter Hunt (1991, 57) cites Nicholas Tucker's (1977) identification of spontaneous play as a transcendent characteristic of childhood. Linked to Rousseau's theories of education, the notion of play, and uninterrupted happiness, as the *natural* state of the child is significant; playing children are viewed as free and without care, and the unhappy child is thus deemed 'unnatural, an indictment of somebody: parent, institution, nation' (Kincaid, 1992, 80). Stretton likewise assumes an entitlement to certain forms of childhood experience - the right to 'unbroken childish happiness' (The Lord's Pursebearers, 1883, Ch.18), a vision which imagines the child as 'rosy and merry-faced', free from responsibility and burdens. Such ideals are embodied, and frequently enacted, in the Edenic pastoral setting of the garden/rural space, with its associations of prelapsarian childhood innocence. They underlie, in part, the practical preoccupation with the provision of a healthy, carefree environment - evidenced, at least in token/temporary form, in the popular 'outing' to the country, from which, as Stretton (1893, 10) writes, children return with something resembling the [normalised] 'merry faces of childhood'.⁷

The cares of Hester in Stretton's longer novel, Hester Morley's Promise (1873) are perceived as unchildlike: she sighs 'as a child seldom sighs' (Ch.4). The duties and obligations undertaken by the young protagonist of the earlier Fern's Hollow (1864) herald the end of childhood; there is too much responsibility, and 'no more play-time' (Ch.2). In the grim lodging houses of The Lord's Pursebearers, there is 'not a sound of play or laughter' (Ch. 2). Stretton's concerns echo those expressed in Dickens's The Old Curiosity Shop: surprised to find Little Nell cooking for her grandfather, and suggesting the accompanying diminution of childhood qualities of confidence and

simplicity, the narrator expresses his grief at 'the initiation of children into the ways of life, when they are scarcely more than infants'. Such initiation 'demands that they share our sorrows before they are capable of entering into our enjoyments' (Dickens, 1841/1985, 48). The response that 'the children of the poor know but few pleasures' (48-9) is significant. Stretton's Hester Morley is a middle/trade-class child weighed down by uncharacteristically heavy burdens. But the poor child of the streets, like ten-year old Little Meg - with her 'anxious air' and slow step 'less like that of a child than a woman' (Little Meg's Children, (1868, Ch.1) - is always represented as old before (what is perceived as) his or her time.⁸

Hesba Stretton, then, emphasises play as an intrinsic part of childhood, perceiving that the existence of her protagonist Tony (Alone in London, 1869) - like that of many a disadvantaged child - is characterised, and judged to be blighted, by a lack of opportunity to play. Yet the borders of childhood are exposed as precarious, determined, in part by age, but also in relation to social class, with definitions at the same time distinct and mutually dependent. Demarcation is, moreover, predicated on a complex web of assumptions, paradoxes and binary oppositions which derive from, and feed into, the plethora of cultural images. Representations may be harnessed to underwrite and perpetuate difference; at the same time, the child figure may be seen to inhabit a particular space, to hold a special position which appears to transcend class or cultural situation.⁹ Stretton both reproduces and explodes the myth of ideal childhood; she participates in different, but equally romanticised and exoticised mythologies which both idealise and render alien the child figure.

If isolation or protection from adult preoccupations entails an ignorance of life's complexities, that ignorance also implies innocence - an innocence which is synonymous with ideal versions of childhood, and which carries multiple symbolic value and cultural charge. The young narrator of Stretton's short story 'Not to be Taken for Granted' (All The Year Round, 7.12.1865, 20) longs for the 'innocent ignorance' of her childhood, spent in a community which 'encircled' and 'shut her in' from the sorrows of the world; Rachel and her fellow prisoners in The Storm of Life (1876) harbour memories of their childhood 'before sin had laid its heavy hand upon them' (Ch.1). The conflation of childhood with a state of innocence is bound up with the concept of the Romantic child, a vision which constructs the child as akin to nature,

uncontaminated and uncorrupted, occupying a state of heightened perception or intuition - different from adults and at the same time superior. Anne Higonnet (1998, 9) discusses the widespread diffusion of the Romantic vision of childhood during the nineteenth century, when the visual construction of childhood innocence took root in popular consciousness, filtering down into mass-market representations.¹⁰

Intersecting with the biblical image of childhood simplicity, this figure of Romantic spirituality is potentially powerful, possessing agency and influence. The Gospels make clear the centrality of the child - his/her right to society's time, care and attention; they also contain the injunction to be 'as a child' in terms of simplicity of faith, and underline the role of the child as potential leader, spiritual/moral guide and redeemer.¹¹ The Christ-like purity of the child is reflected in art, with the naked child-figure of Madonna and child images transposed into wider mother-and-child representations. The association of the state of childhood with the perfection and spirituality of heaven or angels surfaces in artistic representations and in the application of the common epithet of angel, as we shall see. In one of many similar cameos, Elsie, the golden-haired, white-capped infant protagonist of Stretton's Max Kromer (1871) sits, angel-like, at the attic window, with 'nothing to be seen beyond her, save the deep blue sky' (Ch.2). In The Children of Cloverley (1865), a painting by a family member of 'a cluster of the faces of angel-children' (Ch.1), as well as echoing biblical motifs, suggests the configuration of Joshua Reynolds' 'Angels' Heads' (1787); the face of Stretton's child protagonist is deemed to have 'caught the pure and heavenly expression' represented in the family painting. This text, and other Stretton narratives, participate in an empowering discourse of children as intercessors, agents of awakening, conversion and redemption;¹² whilst the protagonist of The Children of Cloverley may display the kind of piety rejected, as discussed, by some contemporary readers, Stretton's approach to this theme is, overall, far from simplistic.

The vision of childhood innocence stands in contrast to, yet overlaps with, Calvinist notions of the innate depravity and 'wickedness' of the child. For Stretton, such puritanical notions are in part supplanted by a countering recognition of the child as innocent, but always present is the evangelical idea of potential corruptibility; if not innately sinful, the child has always that within him which is all too easily led astray, particularly as he leaves childhood behind. The state of childhood remains an

ambiguous one, its Locke-associated '*tabula rasa*' a site of struggle between good and evil influences, personal and political agendas.

The battle, of course, concerns not only the child's mind, but also his or her body. If, as suggested, ideas about the child are rooted in beliefs of what childhood should or should not be, the question of when a child might not, properly, be a child is one which assumes particular significance in relation to sexuality. The idea of childhood innocence conveys an image of a-sexuality, yet the area is fraught with ambiguities and borders are seen to be potentially fluid, as my study will illustrate. Paradoxically, the notion of innocence operates within an eroticised discourse; as Anne Higonnet (1998, 37) asserts, the innocence of the modern Romantic child entails sexual knowledge, because it is defined in opposition to that knowledge. At the same time, innocence itself is rendered the object of desire (Higonnet, 132).

Representations of innocence may be construed as carrying a sexual charge. Anya Krugovoy Silver (2000) writes about the conflation of child and adult in Victorian art, as 'part of a wider confusion between child and adult in nineteenth-century culture', with images of the passive girl-child in art providing a substitute for the woman. The child represented in Millais's 'Cherry Ripe' (1880) is perceived to be both submissive and, at the same time, 'disturbingly sexual in pose' (Silver, 41). In this area, issues of class, and the reinforcement/confusion of class borders, once again become pivotal. Significantly, the security of the middle-class child depends on the construction of the poor or untamed child as 'other', a distinction which emerges forcefully in relation to sexuality, where instincts are viewed as potentially wild and uncontained. Appeals for 'restraint' in girlhood by writers such as Charlotte Yonge engage in part with fears of that sexuality spilling over into the impulses of the middle-class child, in whom its existence is denied. It is in this context that Stretton's child of the streets becomes particularly interesting. The question of sexuality is one largely avoided by children's literature, but examination of sexual undercurrents in relation to numerous representations of the child figure - particularly the lower-class or street child - exposes the signs generated by this lack. Moreover, we have only to look at Lewis Carroll's presentation of Alice Liddell as 'The Beggar Maid' (c.1859), in order to see how the confusion of class borders is intensified and complicated in such an image. My subsequent exploration of sexuality (Chapter 4) will demonstrate how Stretton's

protagonists - innocent, but on the edge of knowing, available and corruptible - participate in an ambiguous discourse.¹³

This aspect of lower-class childhood represents only one facet of a complex contemporary engagement with childhood poverty and deprivation. If the Victorian obsession with, and idealisation of, the child is played out in relation to middle or upper-class society,¹⁴ it is also against this background of assumptions and overlapping/conflicting concepts that we can begin to appreciate the factors which underlie society's particular interest in, and fascination with, the lower-class child, and, in particular, the poor child and the child of the streets. We can also recognise Hesba Stretton's work as occupying a central place in foregrounding this complexity. Precisely because such a picture confounds a middle-class understanding of 'proper', protected childhood, the alleviation of child misery - a condition so antithetical to the idealised image - assumes a heightened significance, potentially eclipsing (and at the same time, standing in for) all other wretchedness.

Michael Benton (1996, 51) stresses that 'the overriding factor governing the literature of the child from 1830s was the condition of children in society', a preoccupation still evidenced in the latter half of the century and reflected in representations across literary and non-literary forms.¹⁵ Contemporary newspapers are replete with accounts such of those in the Morning Star (4/5.1.1867) of children wandering the streets, dying of cold and starvation. From the 'heaps of children' evoked in Dickens's Oliver Twist, (1838/1985, 103) to Mayhew's readily encountered 'ragged, sickly, and ill-fed children, squatting at the entrances of miserable courts, streets, and alleys' (Mayhew, 1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 120), such images abound. Benjamin Waugh (1873/1984, 73) pictures children swarming 'on the doorsteps - children nursing children, children fighting with children'; his impression of 'children everywhere' is echoed by Stretton, and articulated in her assertion of 'thousands and thousands of poor children ... everywhere' (The Lord's Pursebearers (Ch.4)).¹⁶ Engaging with the prominent discourse of the child as victim, the narrator of Stretton's short text, Left Alone (1876), reminds us, in relation to a mother observing the suffering of her child, that 'a great French writer has said, "He who has seen only a man's misery has seen nothing: he must see the misery of a woman. He who has seen only a woman's misery has seen nothing: he must see the misery of a child"'.¹⁷

A fascination with the child and its cultural and symbolic place is increasingly juxtaposed and elided with social concern for the practical welfare of that child. Stimulated by an increased awareness of material deprivation, and reflecting a contemporary engagement with social realism, representations of working-class children in town and country were, as Cunningham (1991) and Benton (1996) confirm, also subject to exploitation and manipulation by writers, artists and photographers. Leslie Williams (1994, 127) notes the readiness of the art market 'to consume pictures of children, especially poor children, in large numbers'. Images, in the process, became romanticised and sentimentalised, sanitised and made picturesque. What Benton (1996, 55) describes as a 'cleaned-up image of poverty' arguably serves to enlist interest and sympathy without the danger of alienation from too obtrusive a social message, a possibility which I have already broached, and will continue to consider, in relation to aspects of Hesba Stretton's work.

Whilst images of the poor child are exoticised in order to appeal, this exotic otherness is harnessed, degraded and manipulated to psychological, cultural, political and philanthropic ends. If the Rousseauesque noble savage is valorised because of its natural wildness, the image also carries a negative charge, making the poor child the object of fascinated interest, a ready scapegoat for society's shortcomings and a candidate for redirection.¹⁸ We find references in Victorian discourse to both the primitive and the poor child, particularly the street child, as manifesting unbridled savagery, and lacking social and sexual restraint. At the same time, the association of the child with the savage and the immature/uncivilised of race and society underpins Victorian colonialist thinking and reflects fundamental issues of power and subordination.¹⁹ The process is multi-directional, as will become apparent from a study of Stretton's portrayal of the outcast city and its inhabitants, and her representation of the marginalised or 'uncivilised' of other cultures; not only are the colonised of the distant dark continent infantilised, but the dark continent is displaced to regions nearer to home. Across the span of literary and non-literary representations, the bare feet of the city child (often presented, as in the case of Stretton's protagonist of Alone in London, as dirt-/mud-*black* feet - my italics) reflect reality and become emblematic of the metropolis and its multiplicity of deeper meanings. Lindsay Smith (1996),

exploring the links between street Arabs, photography and the discourse of colonialism, has noted the convergence of childhood, class and ethnicity in the context of the East End.²⁰ This conflation underlies Stretton's narratives, forming part of a connective strand in her exploration of otherness, in which the binaries of civilisation and barbarism, good and evil, self and other interact in multiple permutations.²¹ Inevitably, as part of an educational and disciplinary enterprise involving the dissemination of social and moral values to the 'uncivilised' both at home and abroad, the representations contained in the fiction of evangelical writers are implicated in the transfer of associations and elision of motifs and meanings. Taking its place within wider overlapping discourses, Stretton's work, because it re-enacts and explores multiple forms of alterity, will be seen to illuminate this interplay - created and reproduced through language, with its charged symbolism and binary oppositions.

The manipulation of images and the harnessing of interchangeable discourses which encompass philanthropy, sexuality, colonialism and eugenics, has been identified by critics such as Lindsay Smith (1996) as an intrinsic part of rescue projects such as that undertaken by Dr. Barnardo.²² A recognition of the ambiguous relationship between these various discourses has generated a debate regarding the motives and methods of those involved in what has been described as 'philanthropic abduction' (Cunningham, 1991, 145). Barnardo's Tracts, with their language of 'fishing', 'baiting the hook', 'catching' and 'kidnapping' betray an uneasy relation to discourses of seduction. In Stretton's writing, although the language is less charged and emotive, the parallels with Barnardo's accounts of his activities are striking. Like Stretton's Jessica, Barnardo's city waif is drawn by the comforting warmth and fragrance of the coffee; the hungry, cold and half-naked, are not only lured into vice and crime, but enticed by philanthropists. Jessica's condition/situation carries multiple nuances; Stretton's narrative, however, in part subverts a straightforward rescue encounter, and imagines a two-way process whereby the hypocritical and socially dysfunctional Daniel is also 'rescued' - emotionally, morally and spiritually, through the agency of the child.

The Lord's Pursebearers contrasts society's lack of concern about crimes against the child with the attention paid to crimes against property. The text also highlights the fact that the children concerned, despite belonging to no one, do in fact represent a form of property, in more than one sense. The wealthy man who, from honest motives, sets out

personally to rescue a child attempts literally to buy one from the beggar community, here underlining the child's lack of agency, and his/her position as a commodity which may serve to gratify adult desires, self-esteem or nostalgia. The child, as social being, as well as in idea and image is confirmed as cultural and actual property.

Such an acknowledgement lies at the heart of the ambiguities which surround aspects of the rescue enterprise, generating a web of conflicting messages. Late nineteenth-century concern for the child brought with it, along with increased protection, the increasing acceptance of the right of society to appropriate the child and to assume control over it, to identify inadequate families and 'parents who are no parents' (Pike, 1875, 17), and to usurp parental decision-making. With hindsight, questions have been raised about the extent of society's duty/entitlement to intervene in lives and relationships; the process of balancing the rights and needs of children with those of parents and families is recognised as complex. Today, we struggle with the dilemma that assisting a child may mean the rupture of a family, to the ultimate detriment of adults and child; that freeing the poor child from his labour in order to give him time to play and learn may mean depriving him and his family of independence and a vital economic contribution.

Hesba Stretton (1893, 5-6) writes of the influence of works such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Cry of the Children' (1844) in awakening the consciences of women, and speaks of 'eyes keener to discern any evil threatening childhood'. Stretton's commitment to the child rescue project involves, as her campaign literature for the LSPCC confirms, an undertaking to reach out to parents as far as possible.²³ Her fictional narratives, in their enactment of social rehabilitation, display a commitment to families of all kinds; at the same time they foreground other aspects of policy, betraying, as I have suggested, a degree of ambivalence. Lindsay Smith (1996, 48) discusses the fact that, in their efforts to save children from the dangers of street-life or parents deemed unfit to care for them, philanthropists such as Barnardo often pitched the children against their parents, a situation reminiscent, as we shall see, of the hostility intermittently displayed by Jessica and other protagonists towards the errant mother. Again with hindsight, historians have identified the social/eugenic concerns which in part underlie the growing emphasis on rescue, re-education, regeneration or relocation of society's poor - whether children and adults. We can recognise, in Stretton's narratives, society's readiness to remove children - through, for example, the process of

emigration - from unsuitable or incomplete families to what might be perceived as a 'better life'. Reflecting this 'naturalised' interweaving of preoccupations, Stretton (1893, 12) identifies her endeavours on behalf of children as being work, not only for God and humanity, but for the fatherland.²⁴

As critics such as Anna Davin (1996) have demonstrated, concern for the rights, welfare and education of children, resulted over time in a gradual erosion of childhood independence, a movement from certain kinds of freedom to a higher degree of containment, a shifting, in fact, of childhood boundaries. In Victorian England, as accounts in the Morning Star (5.1.1867) confirm, ex-theatre fairies like Jessica and ex-crossing-sweepers like Tony were being rescued and, in refuges, trained for service. Yet, for Barnardo's city waif, the idea of going into a Home was associated with being made a 'baby'. From the 1870s/80s, compulsory education brought both opportunities and restrictions; the 'freedom' of the streets, as children like Stretton's fictional Carola were to discover, was curtailed as a result of constant surveillance by the School Inspector. By the century's end, society's growing investment in the child implied advantages in terms of safety, security and well-being, material benefit and future prospects; at the same time, it signalled new limitations for, and expectations of, the increasingly 'valuable' child. Notions of freedom and independence, protection and liberation, clearly have varying connotations, depending on the situation or ideological perspective of those defining them. Such tensions and contradictions, bound up with changes in the structure of the family and with shifting relations between state, family and the child, interact in Hesba Stretton's representations of street and home, to reflect, reproduce and modify/reshape social dynamics.

3.2 A 'spectrum of relationships'

As discussion of the complexity of Victorian notions of childhood has suggested, images of the child are not constructed in isolation: they are defined in relation to wider cultural formations, reflecting dominant power structures and modes of thinking. Representations of the child, as we have seen, interact with wider cultural images, reflecting, perpetuating and reshaping existing beliefs and mythologies, cultural perceptions and social attitudes. They are therefore embedded in social relations, and are re-enacted and reformulated within such relations, with important implications for

individual and group identities, for the operation of power, and for the generation of concrete effects on lives and experiences. Stretton's narratives permit us to expand discussion of the figure of the child, by exploring, across the range of her work, the social roles and relationships represented.

Historian Leonore Davidoff (1995, 11) points out that, in addition to parental influences, children's lives have historically been 'moulded by a spectrum of relationships', and in the work of Hesba Stretton this spectrum can be seen to include a wide variety of primary and secondary relationships. These comprise biological, social and surrogate connections which range from parents, grandparents and siblings to teachers, officials of the state and spiritual authorities. Relationships, both material and spiritual, are central to her writing. It is important to reaffirm, however, that in the case of Stretton's texts, such 'moulding' is, in fact, often a reciprocal process, as this study will continue to demonstrate. An examination of her treatment of the interactions between child and child, between child and adult and between the child and society, highlights the complexity of social relations; the causes and consequences of overprotection, separation and alienation and the frequent blurring or inversion of roles are exposed, and the diversity of bonds and versions of dependency illustrated. Such an investigation makes apparent the interdependence of the personal/psychological and the political, which is played out within diverse social hierarchies and systems of support and nurturance, drawing attention to the interplay between various mechanisms of power and control and individual agency/resistance to authority throughout society. Relationships are shown to be constituted through, and constrained by, economic realities and social pressures/perceptions, involving a network of distinctions between self/other; at various levels, they can be seen to be both culturally specific, and transhistorical.

Impinging on, and frequently mirrored in, these relationships between the child and others in society, are wider social and power relations of diverse kinds, which operate vertically and horizontally. All such relationships are inextricably bound up with dominant assumptions relating to gender roles and class structures/divisions; Stretton is concerned with the effects of cultural attitudes, expectations and unequal power relations on the lives of individuals - not least on the lives of women - and on the functioning of society. Her work illuminates a complex network of human relationships

and configurations of power; a study of her texts reveals an engagement with issues of marginalisation, powerlessness and oppression across the range of social relations, and a dialogue with predominant contemporary social concerns and discussions. Such debates reflect uncertainties and shifting ideas with regard to social roles and codes of morality in Victorian society; an examination of these roles within Stretton's texts demonstrates the interaction of her work with the wider literary/cultural discourses and representations which form part of these debates and power struggles, and which are themselves overlapping and mutually constituted.

In analysing this web, it is pertinent to consider the extent to which Stretton's treatment of roles and relations inevitably reflects and incorporates the values, attitudes and moral/social distinctions of the period, and to identify ways in which perceived norms are contested. A number of intriguing relational patterns and motifs are evident in her work, which cannot be accounted for by merely calling upon received suggestions of the formulaic nature of her writing (although the identification of formulas in itself reveals much about the cultural influences at work). I will argue that the conflicting perspectives and resultant play of forces posited in earlier chapters serve both to incorporate and to problematise fixed definitions of roles, potentially disturbing boundaries and highlighting the fluidity or instability of relationships in ways which will become clear as the various kinds of interaction are explored. In addition, questions are raised, with regard to oppression and empowerment, which complicate received ideas. It is also possible to identify contradictions and crosscurrents, revealing ambiguities and signs of ambivalence which are characteristic of Victorian society, and, at another level, are inscribed in Stretton's own relationships and attitudes as represented in her Log Books, and suggested at various levels in her writing. As we have already seen, there are occasions when Stretton barely disguises her critique of aspects of gender and social relations, using her fiction as a forum for self-expression; at other times such challenges are implicit or unconscious, and interact with naturalised assumptions or external agendas.

For the purpose of examining the diverse kinds of social interaction explored in Stretton's texts and demonstrating its complexity, relationships will initially be loosely divided into categories. However, it will soon become apparent that these categories are inextricably interwoven, overlapping and interdependent, and distinctions are blurred

and undermined, making possible, as indicated, a variety of permutations of order. My discussion will move from an analysis of parent-child and wider family patterns or role reversals in the texts, to an exploration, in subsequent chapters, of other facets of social interaction, involving both child and adult figures.

3.3 Orphanhood, identity and alienation

A study of parent-child relations in Hesba Stretton's writing, as well as investigating textually existent relationships, must take into account the fact that a characteristic feature of her narratives is the absence, inadequacy or ambivalence of such relationships. The situations of her characters arise from a variety of circumstances, and reflect various kinds of displacement; often the implications are economic and class-related. As historian Anna Davin writes, 'throughout the working class almost all family groups were at times under pressure, threatened or actual, from unemployment, drink, illness, old age and death' (Davin, 1996, 180). If not actually an orphan, or quasi-orphan left to survive on his or her own as a result of abandonment, Stretton's protagonists are often practically and emotionally in a state of virtual orphanhood, which may involve the undermining or abdication of parental responsibility/capability by sickness, unemployment, apparent moral weakness or criminality.

In some instances, paternal identity is presented as uncertain: Sandy, in Lost Gip (1873), for example, muses on the likelihood of his baby sister's eyes being the eyes of a gipsy.²⁵ However, if not actually, in terms of the law, the '*filius nullius*' of Victorian legal discourse, the position of the protagonist(s) often reflects the rootlessness, loss of identity and social stigma inscribed in the term 'nobody's child', and at the same time evokes the pathetic response. Such a designation has not only physical implications, but is again bound up with the formation of both social and emotional subjectivities. The concept represents the embodiment of nothingness - a negation of identity, existence and social validity, as Stretton demonstrates.²⁶ When Dot in A Thorny Path (1879) runs away, a neighbour's child expresses surprise at the ensuing panic: 'she didn't belong to nobody that they should make such a fuss' (Ch.12). Identities are often elusive: Don, in the same text, has no 'proper' name, having 'lost it afore I can remember'. He acts to create an identity for himself, adopting the name Don - borrowed from a local dog - because 'folks kept callin' me anythin' they liked, till I didn't even know who I was'

(Ch.2). Nonetheless, when he is buried, he has 'no name that they could put upon the headstone' (Ch.19). Tony, of Alone in London, describes himself as being from 'nowhere particular' (Ch.2), an expression of alienation which echoes that of the street child of Dickens's 'The Haunted Man', who, when requested to give his name and to indicate where he lives, replies, 'Got none', and, 'Live! What's that?' (Dickens, 1848/1995, 296). Like Jo in Bleak House (Dickens, 1853/1996, 308), or the girl crossing-sweeper in MacDonald's At the Back of the North Wind (1871/1966, 41), Stretton's Sandy (Lost Gip) and his nomadic counterparts are constantly being moved on by authority without any possibility of destination, suggesting denial of the right to occupy any existential space.

"Where are I to go, Gip?" he asked one day, after the police had been more than usually hard on him - "where are I to go, and what are I to do? Go about your bis'ness, eh? Well! suppose I ain't got no bis'ness? And I ain't likely to have no bis'ness anywheres, as I can see. I don't know what you and me was born for. They'll begin to tell you to go about your bis'ness as soon as ever you can run in the streets" (Ch.2).

Whether the typical 'street Arab' or victim of temporarily estranged circumstances, the child or young individual in Stretton's fiction becomes largely responsible for its own - and others' - survival, in many cases becoming 'anybody's child'. This latter term echoes a description recalled by Mayhew in his account of the children street-sellers of London (Mayhew, 1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 165), and carries various nuanced implications. As will become clear, a study of Stretton's characters exposes the possibilities opened up by such a position in terms of both oppression/exploitation, and of wider notions of family and relationship.

The image of the 'waif' of the 'street Arab' genre is inextricably enmeshed with the material poverty of his situation. However, the orphan as literary or artistic trope, signalling displacement, insecurity and vulnerability, is common in many kinds of text, including the adult novel and other genres of literature for children, and is not class-specific. Such an image - recurring in diverse social settings within Stretton's work - resonates with archetypal fears of abandonment and has associations with the fairy-tale motif. On a different level, Sally Mitchell (1977, 35) identifies the orphan as the 'type-figure of the nineteenth century, symbolically expressing the decline of social and moral certainties'. As Reynolds and Humble (1993, 27) discuss, the figure may have appealed

to the Victorian reading public because of their consciousness that progress, in the shape of industrialisation, mechanisation and urbanisation, were 'cutting them off from the past and their origins'. From the point of view of women writers and readers, the legitimate imperative for the orphan to become *independent* in terms of decision-making and 'negotiating the world' presented an opportunity for the transgression of conventional feminine behavioural boundaries (27). Multiple symbolism and overlapping but distanced positions open up the potential for the literary orphan to stand in for diverse forms of loss and alienation, and to act as a vehicle for subversive comment.

3.4 Forms of freedom; deprivation, desire and difference

The actual or apparent orphanhood of the protagonist, or the temporary separation/alienation of parent and child, whilst reflecting physical realities, can function as a literary device: it may set the scene for a freedom from conventional restraints, or, as in the case of much Victorian popular fiction, occasion a mystery of origin and identity.²⁷ As well as the emotional charge which such separation or isolation carries, the consequent liberation may provide opportunities for the trials, adventures and substitute relationships - both positive and negative - which are implicated in the process of self-discovery and, frequently, eventual restitution. The orphan - devoid of family ties - may, as Claudia Mills (1987, 228) observes, be the object of envy; the licence inherent in the image offers engagement with the reader's resistance to social constraints. If parenthood, and in particular motherhood, represent, as we shall see in relation to delinquency and promiscuity, a site of socialisation, then the 'motherless' may not be subject to socialisation, and potentially pose an anarchic threat.

In the case of some nineteenth-century texts for children, particularly towards the latter part of the century, and where the setting is a middle-class one (as, for example, in much of the work of E. Nesbit), freedom thus generated is the passport to unaccustomed adventures, experimentation or extended imaginative play, and perhaps a degree of permitted 'naughtiness' or subversion of authority. However, as has been extensively discussed in recent analyses of the limits of transgression on the part of child protagonists in literature,²⁸ freedom is, in these instances, carefully circumscribed, and

the transgression contained; real responsibility or hardship is often fairly limited, although emotional loss and yearning may be intense. For the poor or working-class child in Stretton's texts, freedom is of a different kind. Independence is a material and economic reality, and the escape from the dictates of parental authority may be total; yet such freedom is again fraught with contradictions; it is at the same time more concrete and far-reaching - and thus potentially more alluring and transgressive - and more terrifying, bringing with it physical and moral burdens and material responsibilities which undermine and negate it. It represents a freedom emanating from a fundamental dislocation, enacted paradoxically both out of doors and in confined spaces, in an essentially adult world - a freedom born of exclusion and a 'not-belonging', which is both empowering and restrictive. (A feature of illustrations to these texts is the sense of the protagonist as an outsider - locked out or kept at a distance, as in Appendix IIc.) Ultimately any inherent licence or autonomy is limited by different parameters and at the mercy of outside factors which influence the ability to survive, and of wider agents of authority by which it may be manipulated or curtailed.²⁹ Yet we can see that the versions of childhood which Hesba Stretton's novels present to the middle-class reader function to disturb expectations, and provide encounters with different/conflicting kinds of childhood, or, as Peter Hollindale (2001, 41) discusses, 'differential childness'. At the same time, Stretton's themes undoubtedly chime, at another level, with a shared sense of exclusion and deprivation, fear and insecurity, which transcends class.³⁰ The street child is at once different, and yet, perhaps, in some respects disturbingly the same.

Rejection or deprivation may take many forms; the motherless Hester Morley, because of her gloomy environment and adult responsibilities, is 'starved of sunshine' and the 'lost laughter' of childhood. In numerous Stretton narratives, such deprivation manifests itself in terms of extreme physical hardship - experiences of cold, hunger and pain - which are at the same time closely linked with emotional starvation. Stretton captures, and conveys with an immediacy which betrays intimate observation, the child's experience of sensory deprivation.³¹ In company with the fictional coffee-stall owner, the reader becomes intensely aware of Jessica's gaze, which is reduced and sharpened to 'a pair of very bright dark eyes'. The wary eyes are fastened upon Daniel, and upon the slices of bread and butter on his board, 'with a gaze as hungry as that of a mouse which has been driven by famine into a trap'. Engaging with the child's impulse

to shrink from her material conditions, Stretton directs attention to 'two bare little feet' curling up from the damp pavement. Carefully chosen detail underlines the yearning for respite, as Jessica lifts 'first one and then the other, and [lays] them one over another to gain a momentary feeling of warmth'. The textual situation exposes the vulnerability of the child to the voyeurism of, and potential abuse by, the spectator. However, far from merely reducing her to the status of object for the reader, the focus on body parts arguably invites participation, at a primal level, in Jessica's lack: her eyes gleam 'hungrily' at 'every steaming cupful', and she 'smack[s] her thin lips, as if in fancy she was tasting the warm and fragrant coffee' (Jessica's First Prayer, Ch.1).

Such a cameo encapsulates the experience of basic physical needs denied; it is simultaneously charged with a sense of fear and persecution, and a longing for human warmth and contact, which prefigures and heightens the actual explanation of her exclusion by her mother and her persecution by the police. Hesba Stretton utilises the physical blue-blackness of Jessica's limbs to set up a double-edged image in which signs of coldness and abuse merge, at the same time generating a sense of emotional, as well as material, chill and bruising. When the child reaches out to touch the velvet mantle worn by one of the church congregation (Ch.3), the representation of unaccustomed, class-inflected, tactile experience speaks not only of curiosity about a social world beyond Jessica's knowledge, but, equally, of multiple deprivation and a yearning for primary comfort and interaction. Similarly, the fear and isolation of the panic-stricken child abandoned by her mother (A Thorny Path) is made tangible by elision with the physical environment of fog and darkness (Chs. 1 and 2). Throughout these narratives, we are made acutely aware, through the blending of concrete and emotionally symbolic detail, that, in contrast to the comforts enjoyed by those 'cherished little nestlings' of the author's own family, the lives of her protagonists - frequently as a result of circumstances of poverty, but often regardless of social standing - are marked at some stage by rejection or a lack of love.

3.5 Child and parent: psychic, social and patriarchal patterns

Where there are biological parent-child relationships, these are characterised by complex patterns of emotions, which span alienation, fear and hatred, attachment, guilt and ambivalence; the interplay between such responses is presented in ways which

foreground conflict and suggest moral ambiguity and lack of resolution as well as reconciliation. Loss, and the overwhelming desire for reunion, are constant motifs in Stretton's work. The longing is often for maternal affection: Tony's sense of yearning and deprivation at the absence of a mother's kiss (Alone in London) echoes the sorrow of Patience in Maria Charlesworth's Ministering Children (1854) who has 'never known a mother's love'; it has resonance in Christina Rossetti's reference in Speaking Likenesses (1874), to the 'unattainable gift of your mother's kiss' (Rossetti/Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher (eds.), 1992, 326).³² When Cassy (Cassy, 1874, Ch.5) clings to her mother's old and faded dress, refusing to allow it to be cut and refashioned, this represents a sustaining of the maternal bond, each contact with the garment signalling a rejoining.³³ Yet the dread of a parent's return - and concomitant threat of renewed parental authority - also constitutes a prominent theme, whether such fear is associated with the convicted criminal father in Pilgrim Street (1867), the abusing father and stepmother in Cassy,³⁴ or the drunken mother who has abandoned her small son and recently-born child in Lost Gip. Present response and action is overshadowed by past abuse or trauma, and the reappearance of such figures constitutes a physical and moral threat to a newly found order and security, in which they have often been supplanted. The parent-child relationship is frequently presented as dysfunctional and characterised by apparent detachment: 'He did not care much for his mother; how could he, when he seldom saw her sober? ... the only proof of relationship she manifested was her demand for any and all of the halfpence he might have in his possession, and her diligent search among his rags for them' (Lost Gip, Ch.1). In this instance an inversion of expected roles has taken place, with the maternal figure exposed as dependent and parasitic, rather than nurturing.³⁵

As well as being victims of deliberate or unavoidable abandonment, in some cases it is the children themselves who demonstrate agency by running away. In Cassy, the eponymous protagonist flees from her father, a motif repeated in other street Arab literature such as Silas Hocking's Her Benny (1880), where the children leave to escape the beatings inflicted by their father. The paradox of the rejected child as ultimately the possession of the parent is also a theme which recurs. It is exemplified in the literal sale of Cassy to Mr. Simon by her father, reflecting the proprietorial aspect of parenthood which tended to go unchallenged until the latter part of the century, as G.K. Behlmer

(1982, 15-16) writes in connection with changing views on parental rights.³⁶ As a strand in Stretton's writing this can be seen to extend, as suggested, to the wider situation of the woman as the property of men, a theme which has been foregrounded in relation to biographical preoccupations, and which will be developed in a more detailed exploration of gender issues.

The figure of the natural father is more consistently absent in many of the texts, represented as non-existent, or at least non-present. Such absences reflect historical circumstances and harsh realities: when Jessica (Jessica's First Prayer) or the waif hero, Tony, of Alone in London, respectively declare that they 'never had any father', such statements echo the assertion of Mayhew's flower-girl respondent that 'None of us ever saw a father' (Mayhew, 1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 63) and may provoke assumptions of illegitimacy. At another level, the father as a relatively detached and shadowy figure perhaps also reflects the more general detachment and non-involvement of fathers in the lives of their offspring across classes.³⁷ As suggested, the reasons for paternal absence in Stretton's stories are varied, and sometimes associated with the imperatives of work, but where the figure of the father is present or implicated, it is frequently associated with perceived failure, and bound up with deep-seated emotions which are often negative. For the outcast child, as Stretton stresses in her introduction to an account of the work of Thomas Barnardo, 'Father is not a name of good omen'; he is either unknown, or known only as their 'worst foe' (Stretton, in Pike, 1875, xii). For the child, or child reader, of other classes, such a perception may not be entirely alien; engagement at various levels with the rejected, deprived or abused figure arguably lies at the heart of Stretton's appeal to her audience.

In opposition to this there are instances of acceptance and tolerance, or at least resignation, as when the narrator asserts that Little Meg 'throw[s] a cloak over her father's faults' (Little Meg's Children, Ch.2). Meg defends him against her brother's enquiry regarding resemblance to the devil; she makes it clear that the devil is infinitely more wicked, on the grounds that her father 'doesn't get drunk often' (Ch.2), and later reasons that the fact that he doesn't beat them 'much' when he is drunk is illustrative of the good care he takes of them (Ch.13). Although, as Davin's account of contemporary investigations shows, fathers seldom evoked the loyalty shown towards mothers, particularly where they responded to stress with recourse to drink or violence (Davin,

1996, 26), Meg's reaction constitutes an instance of allegiance to the father as parent, and, in her aloneness, she is sustained by dreams of his homecoming. Such representations highlight the child's naivety, and the acceptance of the situation as 'naturalised',³⁸ but at the same time point to an awareness of the complexity and moral ambiguity of parent-child relations. The 'grandfather' of the street-child Joan (The Lord's Pursebearers, 1883) paradoxically threatens to flog her if she turns 'bad' - an indication in this case of his concern for her ultimate good in the face of her potential descent, through exploitation and abuse, into crime and prostitution.³⁹ Such a response - perhaps an oblique reflection of the common Christian fear of 'sparing the rod and spoiling the child' - also foregrounds contemporary ambiguities surrounding moral blame. As Bratton (1981, 87) and Demers (1991, 138) note, parents and other adults are not portrayed as infallible in Hesba Stretton's work, and there is clearly a constant tension in Stretton's writing - and in her overall representation of social roles and relationships - between condemnation and understanding.

Yet it is interesting to return to the intensity of some of the responses of Hesba Stretton's characters to the figure of the father, whether it is Tom's initial loathing of his father (whom he wishes dead) in Pilgrim Street, the hatred expressed for Rhoda's stepfather (originally assumed to be her natural father) in the opening lines of the full-length novel The Clives of Burcot, or the reaction of Cassy to her father's betrayal of her dead mother and his abuse of Cassy through the agency of her stepmother.⁴⁰

Examination, across texts, of this recurrent theme underlines the existence of deeper and conflicting undercurrents. The absence or inadequacy of the earthly father, and lack of emotional ties between parent and child, both closes down and opens up possibilities of a relationship with God as heavenly father and provider, thereby offering a medium for furthering the overt evangelical purposes of writer and publisher. The implications, however, are perhaps more complicated and dynamically interactive in nature, involving the integration and interplay of the psychological with the social/political. Situations such as that portrayed in Pilgrim Street reflect the inability of the child in a non-functional father-child relationship to relate to God as a father, and at the same time serve to highlight and rectify a misunderstanding about the nature of God. Arguably, however, the problematical representation of the father figure in general also points to, and interacts with, the questioning of a patriarchal society rooted in a biblical model of

male-domination; it foregrounds the biblical underpinning of society, and the concomitant spiritual symbolism fundamental to the workings of culture, even in its ostensibly secular aspects. Attention is called to the appropriation and redefinition of such a model as the interpretative basis for the cultural codes and images diffused and enacted within it.

This, in turn, can perhaps be related to Stretton's representation of gender relations and the textual (and personal) expression of attitudes towards men, an area already discussed and one which invites further investigation. Set against Stretton's undoubted commitment to the concept of God as consummate father figure, negative images of the father (or stepfather) might also suggest the texts' wider engagement (at conscious and unconscious levels) with contemporary currents of resistance to the patriarchal structures underpinning private lives and wider society - and with the contesting of more abstract notions of 'authority'. This suggestion can be placed in the context of the perceived 'crisis of faith': Stretton's work appears to embody the centrality of religion and its exigencies (and the concomitant concern for the irreligious) in the general life of the nation. At the same time, it enacts the unsettling of religious belief - with its associated questioning of cultural assumptions regarding roles in society. It can thus be located within the network of cultural interrogation which spans the controversies surrounding Darwin's evolutionary theories in On the Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871), the popular diffusion of scientific and secular ideas, the growth of intellectual doubt, and the diverse expressions of early feminism. Positing, as discussed, a multiple and partially unidentifiable audience, and taking into account within this audience varying degrees of awareness, receptivity and opposition in relation to religious motifs and agendas, we can suggest multiple forms of engagement, within the climate of change and uncertainty.⁴¹

3.6 Questions of child-power: opportunities, burdens and boundary-crossing

If the ideal or normative parental role suggests various facets of provision and authority, the inversion of this role - and indeed of other social categories - is a recurrent feature of Stretton's texts. Set against the perception of the child as socially impotent, the idea of the empowerment of the child figure through its representation as agent of transformation, both practically and spiritually, has been posited in relation to the child

protagonist of the evangelical text. M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 134), discusses the Romantic understanding of the child as 'soul' which underpins Stretton's representation of children as equally important, and often spiritually more perceptive than adults. Also drawing on Romantic-inflected notions of agency, Patricia Demers (1991, 133) proposes that Stretton's children 'individualize and concretize any visionary capacity by being actively involved in transforming their world'. Discussing the impact of Jessica's First Prayer, Sally Mitchell (1995, 6) suggests that its popularity may in part be attributable to readers' engagement with the sense of Jessica's 'ultimate power over all the adults in the tale'. Such recognition of fictional empowerment may be appropriated by readers across classes, to fit experiences of unequal power relations in a variety of social and domestic situations. Although it might be argued that awareness and agency are confined to the pages of the texts and thus imaginatively compensatory, we can suggest that fictional empowerment may serve not only to make readers *feel* powerful, but also to impart the confidence to speak and act.

Of course, the extent to which this power ultimately compensates for a lack of economic and wider social power is open to debate, and is difficult to quantify; parallels can perhaps be drawn with the intangibility of areas of female influence. Stretton's stories do not convey a simplistic message with regard to the child as spiritual influence on the parent: there are occasions when there is an underlying ambiguity about the effectiveness of the child's spiritual mission (Cassy); sometimes, as in the case of the mothers in Jessica's Mother and Lost Gip, as well as Tom's father (Pilgrim Street), the parent is not automatically redeemed. Frequently, however, it is other adults who are positively affected, whether it is the coffee-stall holder Standring in Jessica, or the policeman in Pilgrim Street; arguably, the child protagonist does, in these situations, act as a direct and indirect instrument for change, the use of the child's perspective affording a critique of adult positions of authority, both spiritual and secular. The intervention of Lucy (Enoch Roden's Training) prevents the imposition of a prison sentence on her father; Sandy, protagonist of Lost Gip, openly confronts Mr. Shafto with his hypocrisy. The effectiveness of the spiritual influence unknowingly exerted by Jessica on minister and church officials (Jessica's First Prayer and Jessica's Mother) represents a usurpation of the power of normative male spiritual authority.⁴² In Jessica's naïve, but pointed, response to a mention of 'reckoning day', it can be argued

that the ignorance of the poor and irreligious is being highlighted; at the same time, the child's straightforward openness suggests a conscience less troubled than that of her adult companion.⁴³ Moreover, it might be suggested that, as part of an ongoing dialogue in Stretton's work, an ironic emphasis on the material subverts dominant notions of the power of the spiritual, deflating 'other-worldliness'. Daniel has God's judgement Day in mind, but for the pragmatic Jessica the phrase relates to paid work in the theatre, and has purely economic connotations, bound up with basic survival: "Does God have reckoning days?" asked Jessica. "I used to like reckoning days when I was a fairy" (*Jessica's First Prayer*, Ch.7).

Critiques of authority and reversals of influence function to undermine the overriding impression of the imbalance of power relations conveyed by many of the illustrations, where authority figures - often dark, central, overpowering - tend to dominate the images. Furthermore, the child's viewpoint serves to question ways of seeing. For Jessica, a first glimpse of the inside of a church is a 'peep into fairy-land'; this may signify a sense of amazement and awe, but the association might also be said to carry an implication of fantasy and make-believe, or (in the light of the Jessica's acting role mentioned earlier) pure theatre. The effect may be to invite a view of the church as a superior alternative to those other supernatural preoccupations, but the juxtaposition of these elements, whatever the intent, may well have an interrogative function which unsettles views of the church as truth, and as an institution not to be questioned. There is no doubt that the child is used in many instances as a mouthpiece for deliberate comment. Whether or not the literary utilisation of the child's point of view for the purposes of comment, when deliberate, constitutes a legitimate form of subversion, or whether it represents a form of exploitation, is, as suggested, a difficult question. Arguably, where the status of the child is not devalued (and may, in fact, be elevated), and particularly where the child constitutes of itself the 'political project' - as is generally the case with Stretton's treatment - such strategies may be deemed valid.

The role reversal implicit in the assumption by the child of the function of parent as material provider is an image which pervades the texts, whether it is as breadwinner, household manager, provider of shelter, carer/nurturer or a combination of all these roles involving responsibility for the cohesion of all or parts of the family unit. It is an image which also pervaded Victorian social commentary. Ellen Ross (1993, 8) suggests

that in poor districts of Victorian London, without the presence of a 'reasonably competent adult woman or older daughter, households often "broke up"'. Frequently, the responsibility for care fell on those who were themselves still children. The contemporary writer and social investigator, George R. Sims, records finding, in the attic of a slum lodging-house, a child as young as four years old who had been placed as 'a little sentinel' to guard the baby, and who often remained in sole charge for eight hours at a stretch (Sims, 1889/Keating (ed.), 1976, 72). The child protagonist of Stretton's Little Meg's Children - a few years older than Sim's 'little sentinel', but still, essentially, a child - struggles, as Patricia Demers (1991, 143) notes, to keep the family together in the absence of their sailor father.⁴⁴ In the wake of the abdication of responsibility by the adults, the eponymous Cassy assumes control of the practical and economic burden of the household, resorting, like Meg, to the common management strategy employed by women, namely the pawning of belongings. It must be acknowledged that such situations generate responsibility which is primarily without privilege; nonetheless, an unsettling of roles and positions of authority within the family does take place. In some cases, this is a direct role reversal, with the parent, perhaps through sickness or unemployment, in the position of dependant or recipient.⁴⁵ Frequently, the role of parent is assumed through absence or default, the child or young person (of either sex) taking on the surrogate position in respect of one or more siblings, responsible for physical, emotional and moral welfare and the devising of successful survival strategies.⁴⁶ Such experiences evidence the instability of definitions of childhood, and have deeper, less tangible implications. The image contained in a Barnardo Tract ('A City Waif', 1885/6) of the 'womanly independent little creature', who is 'yet but a child' carries multiple nuances, further calling into question boundaries between childhood and adulthood, as my exploration of sexual motifs will confirm.⁴⁷

In addition to the traditional female 'little mother' figure (like Stretton's Meg or Dickens's Charley Neckett), Davin (1996, 89) reports that the 'little mother' might also be a boy. Such adoption of the mothering role, with its undermining of prescribed gender identities, is a common feature of the 'waif novels'. It is exemplified in such characters as Stretton's Sandy in Lost Gip, to whom the new-born Gip is handed over with complete acceptance of his role, and Don in A Thorny Path, whose adopted sister

Dot is described as ‘my little gel’. Don becomes the sacrificial mother, bearing the burden of economic management and going hungry to feed the child.⁴⁸ In Alone in London, Tony assumes a nurturing role in respect of the small child, Dolly, and sets about earning a living as a crossing-sweeper - a common enterprise recorded by Mayhew, and an image used by Dickens and repeated in works such as Froggy’s Little Brother (1875) by Mrs. Castle Smith. The sentimentalisation of this ubiquitous image is, however, sharply overturned in Stretton’s The Lord’s Pursebearers, in which the narrator castigates the prosperous inhabitants of the city who perpetuate ‘the sin and shame of having almost naked children to sweep their crossings’ (Ch.6). Mayhew (1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 166) describes the friendlessness inherent in the plight of street children. This is echoed in Stretton’s assertion - with its biblical connotations - in Lost Gip, that Sandy has ‘never known a friend to whom he could say, “I am hungry, and cold, and almost naked”’ (Ch.1).⁴⁹ It becomes apparent that the sibling relationship, or surrogate sibling connection, may represent the only possible source of an affirmative sense of identity: ““Nobody belongs to her or me. I’m all she’s got, and she’s all I’ve got.”” (A Thorny Path, Ch.13).⁵⁰ Ironically, in the case of Tony and Dolly, the protective role is arguably complicated to some extent by the fact that the boy recognises the likely advantages of the child’s good looks in attracting charity, echoing, as will emerge, a more general exploitation of children by adults for begging and more sinister purposes - this time, child potentially exploiting child.

The assumption of the adult role entails burdensome responsibilities, yet, paradoxically, it also presents opportunities which serve to undermine wider social norms. Mayhew records the involvement of children in the world of commerce on the streets; Stretton’s street children, despite the hardship and setbacks they face, prove themselves on occasion to be capable and successful entrepreneurs, taking part and being accepted in the adult world in ways which are not open to the confined and protected middle-class child to whom such autonomy is denied. Moreover, they take a pride in their independence; like Thomas Barnardo’s ‘city waifs’, the youngster ‘picking up a living’ or ‘earning her bread’ holds his or her head high.⁵¹ Valorisations of work and play are subject to ambivalence; as Mayhew’s Watercress Girl asserts, ‘it’s like a child to care for sugar-sticks, and not like one who’s got a living and vittals to earn’ (Mayhew, 1861-2/1985, 68). The need for the child to fend for himself may be deplored; yet an

underlying engagement with the prevailing work ethic means that practical effort and a sense of independent achievement is endorsed, as in Stretton's Pilgrim Street, where the young Tom utilises a monetary gift to set himself up with the means to earn a living. The evident pride displayed by waif Tony in having established his broom and crossing as his 'property' (Alone in London, Ch.9) is clearly appreciated by the narrator. Every confidence is placed in the boy's ability to act responsibly; his sense of triumph is shown to be marred only by the scathing disapproval of 'respectable' Aunt Charlotte. Like that of certain contemporaries, Stretton's writing evidences an awareness, and, to some degree, an admiration for aspects of difference, which is in tension with middle-class preconceptions.⁵²

The fact that inclusion in the adult workplace may be valued by the participant - and envied by the schoolboy counterpart from a different and more privileged background - is signalled in Stretton's The Children of Cloverley, underlining cultural differences and interrogating the class-determined delineation of childhood boundaries, with children themselves contesting conventionally defined parameters. For the orphaned Ben, newly arrived in England from North America, where he has for two years been 'holding the post of a man, and doing a man's work upon his father's farm', a return to full-time schooling renders it 'a very mortifying thing to find himself brought down to the level of boyhood again' (Ch.6). At the same time, the highly educated Gilbert, frustrated by his inadequacy in the adult world, yearns to be more capable: "I am nearly as old as Ben, and many a boy begins to earn his own living at our age" (Ch.8). It is too simplistic to suggest that Stretton unequivocally supports the idea of employment for her young protagonists; the freedom from responsibility associated with an ideal childhood is frequently in conflict with the perceived benefits of education or the prevailing work ethic.

Boundaries of diverse nature are crossed or blurred in Stretton's representation of relational models: there are circumstances in which the inversion of the socialising function of the parent is foregrounded, exposing conflicting familial and social pressures. In Jessica's Mother (1867), for example, the child Jessica intervenes to admonish her mother when the latter's inebriate state causes her daughter to take charge in matters of social propriety: "But, mother ... you can't live here, because it's Mr. Daniel's house, and he only took me out of charity, when I was ill, and you left me.

We can't look for him to take you'" (Ch.5). Here, Jessica's response shows her to be to some extent complicit with society's rejection of her mother, even though she also acts as defender and mediator.⁵³ On other occasions, whilst the situation of the child as educator is potentially empowering, the symbolic value of the adult role and responsibility may be circumscribed, as the class implications of twelve-year-old Annie's teaching role in The Children of Cloverley suggest. Despite the element of status inherent in such a position, it is significant that the young girl is entrusted with the instruction of adults of the poorer section of her community.

3.7 Family configurations: common causes, counterfeit connections and child victims

Instances of surrogate parenthood, and of substitute relationships of diverse kinds, are numerous and complex, illustrating the plurality of modes and configurations of social connection and nurture. Such complications of role are represented not only in the context of immediate biological family, but across generations, within neighbourhoods and among strangers, suggesting a recasting of the family which unsettles fixed definitions of roles, overturning conventional assumptions and highlighting alternative versions. The family is represented as potentially a site of both security, and as Mitchell (1995, 153) observes, of violence and pain; the identification of negative aspects may serve to validate experiences and unlock the unvoiceable across classes. In the course of Stretton's various redefinitions, the ideology of the family is both upheld and subverted.

Whilst, as has been noted, the child is often seen to assume responsibility for siblings, this task sometimes encompassing children beyond the family group, responsibilities also extend to the wider social interaction of individuals, which can frequently be seen to involve co-operation and mutual nurture. Inevitably, the absence of the natural (or biological) parent leaves the path open for the assumption of the parental role by other adults in the family or wider community. As Anna Davin (1996, 61) points out, among Victorian poor families 'the boundaries of the household were relatively permeable', with neighbours often sharing responsibilities and resources. Sometimes in Stretton's texts, neighbours take on the burden; often 'adoption' results from more distant encounters, and is in the main intra-class, although gradations of class are involved and class barriers are in some instances eroded. The alternative parent is often, but not

always, another mother of a family. In the case of Jessica, the child is eventually adopted by Standring, a lone male; in Carola (1884), the adult protector of the protagonist's early life (and of her honour) is the elderly Jewish landlord. Although Stretton frequently reinforces the fundamental nature of the mother's role, she also subverts conventional gender paradigms, showing men as well as boys to be sensitive, capable and effective nurturers.⁵⁴ Engagement with emotional issues is offered to the male reader, for whom such topics may be deemed unmanly and whose needs may not be provided for in wider literature for boys. Nonetheless, progress to physical maturity is also clearly associated with the acquisition of implied adult male responsibilities and, in certain circumstances, with the capacity for emotional self-restraint.⁵⁵

The child may look to others to alleviate his suffering and loss; equally, the narrative of alternative relationships speaks of the adult's need for a child. It is noticeable in Stretton's texts that not only do children seek and find substitute parents (and indeed grown men respond to replacement mother figures), but frequently the adoption of the surrogate role is prompted by the urge to nurture a replacement child. This may be as a result of social estrangement, as in the case of Kitty's mother in Little Meg's Children, or the loss of a child through death, as in the instance of the couple who give shelter to the protagonist and her child in The Storm of Life. The need to preserve the child's memory is apparent in the bereaved mother in Enoch Roden's Training; she transfers the expenditure which would have been incurred in the upbringing of her own child to the care of another, who will, to the family, be 'something like' the child which was lost. Sandy of Lost Gip, taken in by the parents of a sick child whom he befriends, is, in effect - although Stretton presumably does not intend the process to be read in this light - schooled socially and spiritually so that he may slip into the role of son when the natural child dies. Such yearnings inevitably reflect the high rate of child mortality in Victorian society: in the 1880s, 152 children out of every 1,000 born in London died before the age of one, with much higher rates in poor districts (Davin, 1996, 17). The substitutions enacted in Stretton's narratives, and the emotions which underlie them, were clearly common features of Victorian life; they are echoed in Barnardo's account ('Kidnapped') of bereaved parents who bring their dead child's shoes to one of the Homes in order to find and take charge of a child whose feet they fit, and in the

adoption by Mrs. Castle Smith's 'Froggy' of a replacement sibling (Froggy's Little Brother, 1875).⁵⁶

Hesba Stretton emphasises the links between old and young, and between children and the infirm or disabled, suggesting survival strategies and structures of support among the marginalised, which in turn help to break down oppositions and generational barriers.⁵⁷ Such connections also highlight the economic deprivation experienced by particular sections of society; as Davin states (1996, 27) 'poverty was most directly experienced in childhood and in old age'. Old Oliver in Alone in London provides shelter and nurture for the child Tony; for his part, the latter not only takes it upon himself to contribute to the care of the grandchild, but also attempts to compensate for the failing ability of the old man to organise his business effectively, pledging to protect him from exploitation. In Bede's Charity, the mature woman who has fallen upon hard times and the young boy of the streets support one another practically and emotionally. Likewise, the old father and the abandoned child of A Thorny Path share the experience of desolation, one in his literal blindness, the other in the isolating mist and darkness of the night. Age distinctions are blurred, and cross-generational solidarity affirmed, as old and young live, work and sometimes play, together. In some instances, as we have seen, the young, taking part from an early age in the struggle for survival, have never learned to play; often, the old have forgotten. As Sylvanus in The Storm of Life affirms: 'I'm beginning to be fond of play again, like a child, only I've had no playfellows' (Ch.9). Similarly, Oliver (Alone in London) regains a childlike insouciance as he spends time with the child, Dolly; the experience is presented as positive - regeneration rather than negative regression. The child as golden-haired treasure is a repeated theme, the various economic and broader symbolic associations of which will be explored further, but the relationship of old Oliver and his grandchild can inevitably be seen as echoing the surrogate father/child relationship central to Eliot's Silas Marner (1861), and as offering the possibility of alternative forms of parenting.

Young Cassy takes on the burden of nursing a dying old man, and in her turn receives shelter and protection from the disabled Simon - again, an alliance of the disenfranchised.⁵⁸ Davin (1996, 26) observes, in relation to abusive fathers, that men in old age no longer inspired fear, and it is interesting to consider the occasions on which the old or infirm provide the succour which has been lacking. It is possible to take this

further, and to suggest that in Stretton's work, comfortable relationships between men and women frequently take place when there has been a shifting in relations of power, a pattern which will emerge as part of my consideration of gender issues.

If Stretton's work embraces the positive reconfiguration of conventional family structures, it also emphasises the sinister implications of certain surrogate relationships and counterfeit family ties. Her growing awareness of the vulnerability of the child to all forms of exploitation culminates in her stark representation of the predatory nature of the beggar community in The Lord's Pursebearers - of those who 'trade on the agony of babies' (Ch.11). This text emphasises the child's value to, yet dependency upon, the adults of the community. The pretty child lightly used as a picturesque accessory in Alone in London, or to 'soften hearts' in A Thorny Path, becomes unequivocally, in The Lord's Pursebearers, the child victim - hired out and exhibited under the gaslights as a 'living skeleton', or, as I shall suggest in my exploration of sexuality (Chapter 4), exploited for its erotic potential.⁵⁹

Fraudulent family units are created from the fragments of real families; relationships are enacted to excite pity/sympathy and to serve economic ends,⁶⁰ underlining at the same time aspects of the city as theatre and the constituents of city life as performance. In the case of The Lord's Pursebearers, the child protagonist recognises the existence of three 'fathers' - a role adopted for pragmatic reasons - none of whom is likely, however, to take responsibility when the child is in trouble. The dependency of the children on the evil Mrs. Moss - another version of the wicked stepmother figure, who has the children in her 'power' - is reminiscent of the situation in Barnardo's narrative 'Kidnapped' (1885/6), in which Mother Brown (known as 'Grannie') keeps children in an underground kitchen, half starves them and sells/hires them out.⁶¹ The agency of Stretton's adult 'cast' - in this instance active creators and perpetrators of the theatrical process rather than passive objects of the spectator's gaze - reminds us of what Mayhew's reporter describes as the 'ingenuity' of the beggar, a figure possessing a particular facility for judging and adapting to 'the bent of popular sympathy' (Mayhew, 1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 505).⁶² However, despite her understanding of the attractions of a vagabond existence, Stretton's anger is directed in no uncertain terms both at those who mercilessly exploit the young, and at those whose indiscriminate charity encourages the practice of begging which she decries. That the face of society is

turned away when it comes to intervention, despite changes in the law, is highlighted by the narrator's comment that 'as it was not a matter affecting property, and had only to do with the lives of little friendless children, the investigation was not followed up very vigorously' (Ch.19). The career of Mrs. Moss and her comrades, Stretton makes clear, will suffer only brief interruption as a result of token official action.

Uncontainable anger permeates a later narrative centring on the exploitation and commodification of children - this time within an organised public arena of spectacle, the circus. As the century progressed, the thousands of children employed in theatre and shows were attracting increased attention within society, with pressure for reform and effective legislation. In An Acrobat's Girlhood (1889), Stretton recounts, through the voice of the protagonist's sister, the story of a motherless young girl whose high spirits, strong will and overt physicality challenge conventions of feminine propriety. Displaying delight in romping like an 'unbroken colt' and 'doing things a boy would do' (Ch.1), Trixy attracts the attention of circus managers. The child's father - self-indulgent and lacking a mother's protective instincts - perceives his growing daughters as 'burdens' and is tempted by the promise of future fortune to hand over the initially enthusiastic girl to the circus troupe to be trained as an acrobat.⁶³ In this environment, authority figures become 'tyrants'; they hold the girl and her younger co-workers 'in their possession', exploiting them as objects of the public gaze. The children are pushed relentlessly, driven with threats and blows to train their bodies to the point of injury and distortion, exhaustion and collapse. The physical consequences are foregrounded, but the moral/sexual implications are also signalled, as will become clear in Chapter 4 of this study; Trixy has, mercifully, 'only lost her life' (Ch.4). Stretton repeatedly stresses that the abuse takes place as part of the provision of entertainment directed at the gratification of other *children and their families* (my italics). The perpetuation of such 'savage' practices, only fit for 'heathen and Hottentots', depends on the complicity of audiences which include, unbelievably, *mothers* - decent women who would not countenance the idea of their own offspring being subjected to such treatment or exposure, but who continue to support the industry with their ticket money.

Despite the shortcomings of family life in all its guises, the hardships experienced by families, and the enforced separation of children from their parents, whether through circumstances of bereavement, imprisonment, persecution, famine or war represent a

constant concern for Hesba Stretton. As a result of society's indifference and insensitivity, estrangement may be emotional as well as physical: the consequences for Rosy of confinement for the duration of her mother's prison sentence (The Storm of Life) include not only a form of blindness, but, because workhouse staff paint the mother as a wicked woman, a temporary refusal by the child to acknowledge the maternal relationship. In the later Russian-themed text, In the Hollow of His Hand (1897), Stretton, as we shall see, identifies children as pawns in the political persecution of adult communities under authoritarian regimes; she likewise engages, as she does in so many texts, with the disastrous consequences of religious and political division. In narratives such as Left Alone (1876), the blindness and bigotry of entrenched religious positions within families and society results in the physical and emotional neglect of the child caught up in its destructiveness.

Mitzi Myers (1997, 117) has commented on the invisibility and silence of women and children amidst masculine mythologies of war and conflict. Significantly, in Stretton's Max Kromer, set during the Siege of Strasbourg, the author draws attention to the effects of war on the lives of the women and children, and of those who exist in poverty. For these victims - dying 'by hundreds and thousands' - there can be no 'glory' (Ch.2), but 'all loss and no gain' (Ch.5). Stretton harnesses the perceptions and responses, the simplicity and straightforwardness of the fictional child in conjunction with the first-person narrative of a male combatant to expose and interrogate destructive male models which privilege unthinking patriotism, conflict and aggression; she portrays, unflinchingly, the suffering and displacement of ordinary people as a consequence of violent warfare. The fragility of what, in less disturbed circumstances, may be accepted complacently as the functioning unity of Christ's community, is exposed by Stretton's critique. Identification of the divisions, created by war, religious differences and overtly nationalistic propaganda, which exist between neighbouring communities - between individuals and families who have hitherto interacted as friends (Ch.4) - all too painfully points up the continued relevance for today's world. At home, Hesba Stretton was directing a searchlight on the plight of the London street child; at the same time, her writing foregrounds the relationship of that figure to the situation of the child victim worldwide, emphasising the truth that the ideologies, decisions and actions of adult

authority figures - within the family or through wider social structures - rebound upon the children, who, practically speaking, possess limited agency in such circumstances.

In this chapter, I have concentrated on the representation of diverse aspects of psychological and social relations - or the absence of relations - between the child and immediate community. Attention has been drawn to the reproduction and inversion of dominant perceptions and practices; it will be seen that Stretton's work both incorporates and subverts idealised notions of childhood, juxtaposing powerlessness and resilience, interrogating yet supporting the transcendent function of the child. As an extension of the themes introduced here, her treatment of the relationship between the child/individual and wider society - and with diverse forms of authority - as well as the conflicts, confrontations and cultural subtexts inherent in this relationship, will be further examined in relation to diverse facets of outcast society. It will become clear that attitudes and power relations within private and public spheres are inextricably linked and that individual and community identities and practices are both mutually reinforcing and in a state of conflict.

Discussion of childhood roles has established that boundaries between boyhood and manhood, girlhood and womanhood, innocence and experience are arbitrarily constructed, materially and symbolically blurred; the heightened implications of such elisions and confusions will become apparent over the course of the subsequent chapters. Importantly, the sexual undercurrents and signposts generated as a consequence of the experiences of, and the shifting mythologies surrounding, the pubescent female will be uncovered. My exploration of textual and contextual representations of juvenile delinquency and crime will further underline the class-related permeability of childhood boundaries and associated responses to deviance and punishment. The place of the child figure will be further illuminated as questions of social status, race and persecution of all kinds are examined in relation to hierarchical/binary structures and prevailing myths, and in terms of notions/expressions of 'otherness', recapitulation and eugenics.

Writing towards the end of her life about women's work for children, Stretton (1893, 4) emphasised the link between children's happiness and the rights of women. The converging and interdependent stories of women and children unfold across her work;

issues of mothering and the situation of the woman as mother, inextricably bound up with gender relations and identity, emerge as central. Just as the perspective of the child towards its mother can be seen to be - often painfully - significant, so the perspective of the woman, whether she is uplifted or burdened by motherhood, estranged, bereaved or childless, is brought into focus and subjected to scrutiny.

In her representation of multiple forms of interaction, Stretton, as well as reflecting and, to an extent, reproducing structures of division/opposition, unremittingly foregrounds deprivation, hypocrisy and inequality. The conscious and unconscious construction of distinctions and divisions between generations, sexes and races is overtly highlighted in her work, and the part played by the internalisation and perpetuation of totalising concepts becomes apparent. Acknowledging social relationships as highly complex and ambiguous, she is concerned with breaking down social barriers - seeking to build/repair bridges between sections of society and at the same time exposing gulfs, paradoxes and misunderstandings. As part of this reconciliatory project, the child - despite its limitations - plays a significant role as an agent of interrogation and a force for negotiation and mediation.

¹ Mitzi Myers (1995, 3) recognises the child as a 'historically constituted signifier' - an 'evocative, contradictory, and ideologically weighted verbal image'.

² Carolyn Steedman (1995), exploring childhood and its relationship to the development of notions of interiority, identifies the child-figure as becoming 'a central vehicle for expressing ideas about the self and its history' (5). Steedman posits the notion of children as 'the first metaphor for all people', or in a revision of her earlier theories, part of a process of personification (17-18); she discusses ways in which the figure of the child is implicated in the shaping of feelings, and the structuring of feeling into thought (19). She also pays attention to the role of the street child in this process, and comments on the influence of the literary child-figure in the formulation of political policy on childhood in the late nineteenth century (96). Laura Berry (1999), positing a figure who is both liberal and Foucauldian subject, and highlighting the overlap of the individual and the social, the private and the public, further considers the pervasive fascination with victimised children in particular, in order to demonstrate ways in which nineteenth-century novels and reform writings 'reorganize ideas of self and society as narratives of childhood distress' (3). The representation of the self as a child victim means that individual and social demands are, at least temporarily, 'simultaneously endorsed', the child occupying a place which 'homogenizes rather than fragments the social community' (4-5).

³ In considering the complexity of the child/marginalised figure embedded in Stretton's work, it is useful to highlight Perry Nodelman's use of the Lacanian view of the other as 'what defines the self not only by being what the self is not, but also by being what it lacks and therefore what it both fears and desires'.

Such an understanding is reflected in the adult's alternating perceptions of the child as, for example, 'wonderfully innocent and woefully ignorant, desirably or disgustingly different' (Nodelman, 1992, 34).

⁴ Perry Nodelman quotes Edward Said's (1978) observation that, given the assumption that 'any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer', it must be recognised that a representation is 'implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth', of which it is itself a representation' (Nodelman, 1992, 30).

⁵ James Kincaid (2000, 30) sees Dickens as central to the development of the modern child, with all its contradictions; it is constructed 'as a demonic angel, a sexless bundle of eroticism'. Mitzi Myers (1995, 1) recognises 'literary childhood' as beginning 'to play a significant part within the Anglo-American cultural tradition in a Revolutionary era'. Critics such as Anne Higonnet (1998) and Michael Benton (1996) chart the development of images of the child in art from the eighteenth century and earlier, relating these to changes in society. Benton, taking into account representations in literature and painting, discusses the factors which influenced the harnessing of changing, converging and conflicting images, and concludes that whether such appropriation reflects cultural, political or commercial considerations, the image of childhood generally represents 'a construction by adults of the child they wanted to see' (59). Leslie Williams (1994), focusing on the representation of girlhood in the work of John Millais, makes a significant point in attributing the appeal of the subject to 'its complicated symbolic value as a meeting-point for subordination and control, marketability and pricelessness, eroticism and innocence' (124).

⁶ Childhood, as Carolyn Steedman (1992, 7) points out, was 'a category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority or weakness, before it became descriptive of chronological age'. Peter Hunt (1994, 70) suggests that childhood 'approximates to a state of repressed humanity'. Such a perception of childhood is particularly pertinent to the intersection of Stretton's 'child' with the various other categories of marginalisation which figure in her work.

⁷ See also Appendix IIb to this study. Stretton, in an 1884 Appeal on behalf of the LSPCC, reiterates the importance of sunlight, fresh air and laughter in restoring frightened and neglected children to health, a perception echoed by Mrs. Molesworth (1893) in an article, 'For The Little Ones - "Food, Fun and Fresh Air"'. London Children in want of 'country air' could be sent to Homes such as the one cited by Molesworth, in Totteridge, Hertfordshire. In Stretton's Hester Morley's Promise, the park is 'a very Garden of Eden' to those who live in the close and crowded town centre (Ch.8). Motifs of town and country will be further examined in Chapter 6 as part of my exploration of outcast society.

⁸ In Dickens's The Haunted Man, the wild 'child who had never been a child' has a 'face rounded and smoothed by some half-dozen years, but pinched and twisted by the experiences of a life' (Dickens, 1995, 296). Mrs. Castle Smith, in Froggy's Little Brother (1875), writes of children with 'boys' bodies and men's heads' (Ch.6). The attitude of George MacDonald's girl crossing-sweeper towards Diamond (At the Back of the North Wind, 1871/1966, 43) reflects a recognition that the need to 'work for her bread ...

so soon makes people older'. In Henry Mayhew's account of the Watercress Girl (1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985), the writer clearly assesses his respondent in the light of a middle-class perception of childhood. He emphasises the fact that the thinly clad girl has 'entirely lost all childish ways', and is 'in thoughts and manner, a woman' (64). His attempts to consider her as a child are frustrated by her pragmatism and her contempt for play. Underlining the belief in a child's need for play, as well as the blurring of boundaries between child and woman, Stretton's motherless Cassy is encouraged by Mr. Simon to mix with other children, when he finds she 'could play with them yet, in spite of her womanly ways at other times' (*Cassy*, Ch.14).

⁹ In Stretton's narratives, as in wider cultural formations, we can recognise that the figure of the child is enlisted both to reinforce and to bridge class borders. Through the attribution of innocence and incompleteness, representations help to construct the child as in certain respects beyond class, and propose, through the child, a transcendence of the differences and limitations which are never completely erased in the adult.

¹⁰ See, for example, John Millais's 'Bubbles' (1886).

¹¹ Paradoxically, as Hugh Cunningham (1991, 152) points out, childhood became, in some senses, a substitute for religion.

¹² The mere presence and voice of an innocent child are perceived as exerting a restraining or saving influence in respect of immoral behaviour, as in *The Lord's Pursebearers* (Ch.15) or *Hester Morley's Promise*. The purity implicit in Hester's gaze of wonder and innocence, her face 'of a saint - an angel', and her enduring gentle seriousness suggest a potentially redemptive power, reminiscent of that embodied by Brontë's Helen Burns (*Jane Eyre*, 1847) or Alcott's Beth March (*Little Women*, 1868). Interestingly, Hester's 'ignorant innocence' - her lack of awareness of social/sexual deviance and its ramifications - is a 'knowing unknowingness' which allows her to be more perceptive in other ways, and to approach those around her in a more open and less bigoted or judgemental way - a stance which, in some respects, anticipates aspects of the understanding shown by Henry James's Maisie (*What Maisie Knew*, 1897).

¹³ See Appendix II d and II e to this study. Whilst it might be suggested that, from today's viewpoint, we are in danger of reading sexual undertones where none are present, I will demonstrate that contemporary evidence indicates engagement with particular signifiers. Historians such as Judith Walkowitz (1992) conclude that Victorians were alert to such markers.

¹⁴ Bill Ashcroft (2000) suggests that the 'concomitant growth in the Victorian idealisation of the child and the brutalization of the children of the working class is a contradiction suppressed within the discourse of childhood' (188).

¹⁵ In the preface to his narrative *Dick's Fairy*, Silas Hocking (1883) confirms the continued preoccupation with the theme, writing of the 'deep and ... growing interest in the lives of the poorer classes of society, and especially of the waifs and strays of our large towns and cities'. In announcing 'another story of street life', he refers to one hundred and fifty thousand volumes having been disposed of during the previous five years, with the sale still unabated. Laura Berry argues that in nineteenth-century writings, children become 'crucial to mediating anxieties about hungry others' because, in the representation of oppressed children, 'powerful adult appetites' can be transformed into the 'pitiable needs of an innocent (and therefore socially pure) victim' (5).

¹⁶ Historian Ellen Ross (1993, 13) states that, in 1871, 43% of the population of the city were aged fifteen or under.

¹⁷ This quotation also appears in *The Lord's Pursebearers*. Stretton's diaries, as discussed, evidence her interest in the life and work of Victor Hugo; interestingly, the child protagonist of *Left Alone* is named Fantine.

¹⁸ Throughout Stretton's writings, whether in relation to child, class or race, we can identify the kind of tensions inherent in the collision between ideas inspired by Rousseau and those influenced by Locke, the latter view of the child, as summarised by Ashcroft (2000, 189), being that of 'an uninformed person who through literacy, education, reason, self-control, and shame may become a civilised adult'.

¹⁹ As Bill Ashcroft (2000, 190) notes, depoliticised discourses predicated on the childlike characteristics of so-called primitive races 'mirrored unquestioned hierarchical structures of power relations maintained in the middle-class Victorian family'. Darwin-inspired associations between childhood and savagery pervade the writings of explorers and colonisers. Hugh Cunningham (1991), in his comprehensive account of the gradually unfolding 'narrative' of childhood, explores in detail the intersection between discourses of primitivism, savagery and the nineteenth-century waif/delinquent. The various areas of overlap will be highlighted throughout this study.

²⁰ Smith discusses the child as a 'reduced form of ethnic other' (29), and the term 'street Arab' as suggesting 'a knowable other interposed between self and absolute other' (31). (See Thomas Barnardo's

‘ “God’s Little Girl” ’ for a description of the sweep’s child as having a dark skinned, ‘negroish’ look, and my discussion, in Chapter 6.3, of black/white motifs.)

²¹ Significantly, as Daniel Bivona (quoted by Mavis Reimer, 1997, 54) asserts, the initially ‘purely analogical relationships’ which dominated the late-Victorian imagination ‘eventually ... begin to be broken down into more literal ones’.

²² Thomas Barnardo’s tract ‘Kidnapped’ (1885/6) suggests that ‘6,829 poor boys and girls have been saved by our “Homes” from the evils of street life, from the dangers attending orphanhood’.

²³ Hugh Cunningham (1991, 145) asserts that the Society acted to preserve the home wherever possible; out of 754,732 children on whose behalf it intervened between 1889 and 1903, 1,200 were removed from parental custody. Stretton, in an Appeal issued on behalf of the LSPCC in 1884, stressed that it was the intention of the Society, as far as possible, to ‘exert only moral suasion’ - to ‘reason and remonstrate’ with parents (or employers) and, having issued a warning, to ‘entrust them again with their children, under the certainty that their future conduct will be under careful though friendly supervision’ (2-3). In cases of ‘long cruelty and confirmed brutality’ it would be necessary to prosecute offenders and to find homes for the ‘rescued victims of vice’. It was not the Society’s intention to ‘offer any premium to brutality and neglect by relieving the parents of their natural charges’; cruelty would be punished when it could not be prevented (3). In an LSPCC Appeal leaflet produced in 1886 (Letter leaflet No.2), Stretton states that during a period of nearly two years since the opening of the Harpur Street Shelter in London, they had dealt with 242 cases of cruelty and sent 38 men and women to prison for periods varying from one month to five years. She cites instances of brutality and wilful starvation.

²⁴ Scientific interest in the condition of children grew rapidly during the final decades of the nineteenth century. In her introduction to Godfrey Holden Pike’s account of Barnardo’s work (1875), Stretton challenges the social Darwinist/laissez-faire view that, according to ideas of survival of the fittest, the species of the street child will disappear if left unsupported and will contribute to race deterioration if assisted; she points to the ability of these children, despite their conditions, to survive and endure. Describing them as ‘the very individuals whom nature has selected for existence’, she presents the mission to raise them from their circumstances as part of (albeit more than) a ‘patriotic project’ (xiv-xv).

²⁵ Examination of the gypsy motif, an image charged with all the contradictions at work in nineteenth-century discourse of ‘otherness’, is included in my exploration of different kinds of alterity (Chapter 6.8).

²⁶ As Thomas Barnardo’s Tracts illustrate, the gutter child is likely to be identified not as ‘somebody’ but as ‘something’ (see, for example, ‘A City Waif’, 1885/6). The outcast as ‘object’ is reflected in the common conflation or elision of the human and the inanimate, as my focus on language and identity - part of a detailed discussion of the objectification of outcast society - will confirm (Chapter 6).

²⁷ Stretton makes use of the mystery element in novels such as The Clives of Burcot (1867) and The Soul of Honour (1898).

²⁸ See, for example, Stephens (1992) and Myers and Knoepfelmacher (eds.) (1997).

²⁹ As will emerge strongly, society’s preoccupation with the ‘freedom’ of the outcast is one which pervades Victorian literature, fictional and non-fictional. For example, Barnardo’s narratives speak of the free and unrestrained ‘adventure-life’ of the street waif, who is his own master. Similar language and ideas surface throughout Stretton’s text - with contradictory implications - as we have already glimpsed in relation to the intermingling of textual, contextual and biographical motifs. These implications will be examined more closely and their relevance to issues of deviance and systems of control highlighted in Chapters 4 and 6 of this study.

³⁰ Of particular relevance to Stretton’s work are ideas referred to by Perry Nodelman (2000, 9) and echoed, in a different context, by Peter Hollindale (2001, 30). Nodelman speaks of a confrontation between home situations which represent safety and boredom, connection and suffocation, and places away from home which signal danger and excitement, individual freedom and isolation (Nodelman, 2000, 9). See also my discussions throughout of tensions between freedom and containment. Reflecting the precariousness of boundaries in material terms, ‘Little Hester’ (Hester Morley’s Promise, (as the daughter of a ‘fallen’ mother of higher social status, now forced into poverty and frequently ‘in trouble’)) experiences the same feelings of rejection as her ‘street waif’ counterparts. Exiled at school ever since she can remember, she perceives herself as ‘belong[ing] to nobody’ (Ch.60).

³¹ Stretton combines a keen documentary eye with an evident recollection of the feelings of a child, an awareness perhaps reflected in ‘Not to be Taken for Granted’ (1865, 21), in which the narrator wonders ‘if my father ever felt like a child’. Stretton retains an understanding of what it is to be a child in terms of vulnerability and personal loss, and at the same time by reference to the value and privilege of her own protected childhood.

³² Note also the religious connotation evoked by associations with the lines in Rossetti's well-known poem, 'A Christmas Carol' (1875), in which the mother 'worshipped the beloved with a kiss'. The importance of the 'mother's kiss' is stressed by Stretton's contemporary Henrietta Synnot (1876) in an article concerning institutions/orphanages: 'What is to make up for the mother's kiss every night?' (493). Mrs. Walton's Rosie (*A Peep Behind the Scenes*, 1877/1999) is yet another 'motherless' protagonist; both she and her adopted kitten are 'pining for their mother's love' (161). The significance of the mother means that, in effect, motherlessness can deny a person their identity *as a child*.

³³ The association of the lost mother with the remembered dress and imagined kiss recurs in Stretton's 'Not to be Taken for Granted'; the motherless narrator of *An Acrobat's Girlhood* (1889) imagines, as she falls asleep, that she hears her mother calling (Ch.1). The dream of the 'mother's kiss' and, with it, the sense of restored childhood happiness, also appears in Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848/1987, 272).

³⁴ Henry Mayhew, in *London Labour and the London Poor*, refers to several instances of children having run away as a result of the violence of stepmothers rather than stepfathers (Mayhew 1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 163).

³⁵ On occasions, there may be an indication of the mother as emotionally parasitic, as might be suggested by *The Clives of Burcot*. De Mause (1976, 20) speaks of the child as a 'security blanket'. My exploration of motherhood (Chapter 5) will suggest alternative facets and interpretations of close mother-child relationships.

³⁶ Cassy's sense of self-worth is such that she believes the sum of ten shillings paid for her to be too high: 'that's too much! ... I'm not worth that much, I'm sure' (Cassy, Ch.13).

³⁷ This would be in line with theories of the father as secondary object for the child and mother as primary caretaker, socialiser and inner object, as cited by Chodorow (1978, 92). Certainly, in her discussion of fathers in poor families, Davin (1996, 26) reports that in the autobiographical literature, they 'seldom loom as large' as mothers.

³⁸ Violence as a threat or undercurrent constantly figures in Stretton's texts. Adults of either sex may be perpetrators, but male abuse of women is strongly signalled. Ellen Ross (1993, 84/85) writes of an acceptance by the working class community of the inevitability of domestic violence, which was considered a prerogative of those in authority. In Stretton's *Alone in London*, Tony displays a matter-of-fact approach in identifying the mother of the stray child as having 'a bit of a bruise about her eye, as if somebody had been fighting with her' (Ch.2). Such observations are echoed in Barnardo's later account ('"God's Little Girl"', 1885/6) of a street mother who is 'knocked about' and takes to drink. Further instances of the perceived inevitability of violence by authority figures can be found in novels such as Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, in which the narrator informs us that Tom considers beating, along with chimney-sweeping and being hungry, to be 'the way of the world' (1863/1995, 2).

³⁹ See my discussion in Chapter 4, in relation to sexual subtexts, of the charge carried by the terms 'good' and 'bad'.

⁴⁰ Such patterns can be found both in the shorter and in the full-length adult-directed texts by Stretton, in those published by secular as well as religious publishing houses.

⁴¹ Arguably, the crosscurrents provide for engagement with various positions within the debates, operating not only from a regulatory/reformatory perspective, but opening up alternative readings and channels of resistance. The outworking of this premise and the interplay of the conflicting positions will become more apparent in the course of the specific focus on the issue of gender and power relations (Chapter 5 of this study).

⁴² In *Jessica's Mother*, Jessica's relationship with the minister's children is also revised, with Jessica at times assuming an advisory or mentoring role reminiscent of the form of influence eventually exerted by Dickens's Esther Summerson (*Bleak House*) or Sissy Jupe (*Hard Times*).

⁴³ In *Hester Morley's Promise*, the child's straightforwardness in defending her stepmother's ignorance of innate sinfulness, and her frank assertion that people only know they are sinners because they have been 'taught it over and over again', may be read as a condemnation of over-zealous and guilt-inducing approaches to preaching as much as an attempt by Stretton to promulgate the teaching itself (Ch.7).

⁴⁴ In the same year of publication as *Little Meg*, the temporarily fatherless 'Little Women', Meg March and her sisters (Alcott, 1868) are shown to be battling with the complexities of progression from childhood to adulthood while they get used to being 'in poverty' in a rather different social and domestic sphere. In Stretton's *Hester Morley's Promise* (again in a situation of less extreme deprivation), the gradual assumption of premature responsibilities by fourteen-year-old Hester, in the absence of a mother figure, means an end to the 'brief season' of childhood and leads to the acquisition of 'old-fashioned womanliness', once more pointing to the potential for engagement across texts with commonality as well as difference. Across classes, a child can be robbed of his/her childhood by the death of the mother, and

forced to 'put aside childish ways' or assume the 'sad self-possession of a woman'; for various reasons, a child may be 'precociously learned in trouble' (*The Doctor's Dilemma*, Part 3, Ch.6).

⁴⁵ De Mause (1976, 20) suggests that children have always been responsive to the physical and emotional needs of parents, even where parents are abusive. He comments on the child's facility for mothering adults and the fact that children have always taken care of adults in very concrete ways.

⁴⁶ As Anna Davin (1996, 89) confirms in her account of the lives of poor children, even in situations when the mother was present, older children frequently had entire charge of babies.

⁴⁷ In Stretton's *The Children of Cloverley*, the idea of working 'like a little woman' implies prestige. Another aspect which may have appealed to readers, as Penny Brown (183, 1993) discusses, is that of the 'little woman' as sexually attractive. The 'little womanliness' of Stretton's eponymous Hester Morley - childlike innocence mingled with womanly capability - is alluring to her stepmother's ex-lover. See also my fuller discussion of the borders of sexuality in Chapter 4 of this study.

⁴⁸ Reports by religious workers indicate a high incidence of boys as 'nurses and caretakers' (Davin, 1996, 90). Davin (179) also notes recorded instances of the description 'my baby' by boys as well as girls. Barnardo, in *Taken Out of the Gutter* (1881, Ch.1) relates the fact that 'the best and choicest morsels were generously and freely given to the little brother, while 'Arthur, brave fellow, contented himself with whatever might be left.' Mrs. Castle Smith's hero, 'Froggy', similarly gives priority to ensuring that his brother is nourished.

⁴⁹ Such sentiments are echoed in *Froggy's Little Brother*, where the narrator refers to the 'motherless, fatherless and friendless' condition of 'hundreds of our poor little brothers and sisters' (Ch.2).

⁵⁰ This sense of symbiotic dependency between siblings is acute in many of these waif texts. In the case of Stretton's work it perhaps reflects the intermingling of material realities and currents/yearnings of the authorial psyche. In addition to the close sibling or substitute maternal relationship identified between Stretton and her sister, it is useful to note the reference in Stretton's 'Not to be Taken for Granted' to the siblings which her protagonist never knew, and to consider this in relation to Stretton siblings who did not survive. At another level, the bond between the adolescent brother and sister in Stretton's *In Prison and Out* (1880) reflects the intensity of attachment discussed by historians such as Leonore Davidoff (1995), who notes the loyalty, devotion, and often passion, characteristic of some nineteenth-century sibling relationships (210). Foster and Simons (1995, 58) point to the acceptability of more vehement expressions of love between male/female siblings than would be considered appropriate today, but stress the way in which representations of such feelings may, nonetheless, carry implications of sexual awareness. Such erotic undertones might arguably be identified in the parting kiss exchanged between estranged Bess and David: 'She lifted up her pretty, girlish face to him with lowered eyelids and quivering mouth, and he pressed his hot feverish lips upon it' (*In Prison and Out*, Ch.17).

⁵¹ Barnardo constantly refers to the 'bold independence' of the street children (see, for example, 'A City Waif', Ch.2).

⁵² Mrs. Castle Smith, in *Froggy's Little Brother* (Ch.3), identifies play as 'that which is a necessity of childhood', whilst recognising, in relation to Froggy's life as a crossing sweeper, that 'whatever work bread depends on is such a serious matter ...'.

⁵³ The case of Jessica's Mother, and the denial of the adult voice as a consequence of the privileging of the child, will be further explored in my discussion of gender and motherhood.

⁵⁴ This is in line with the contention by Nancy Chodorow (1978), in her analysis of the reproduction of mothering, that there is 'no biological evidence (if we exclude wet-nursing) to support the assumption that women must be "substitute mothers" rather than men' (30).

⁵⁵ The assumption of certain adult duties may be represented as part of a rite of passage to manhood, as in the case of *Max Kromer*, in which the eponymous character feels 'more like a man' when he undertakes to protect the family during his father's absence (Ch.1), a sentiment echoed by the protagonist of *In the Hollow of His Hand*, as he takes on family responsibilities. In such instances, the adult male role tends to be responsible and protective - associated with manliness - rather than directly nurturing. When Titus, of *Enoch Roden's Training*, is moved to tears, he is reproved with 'you must not be a woman' (Ch.17). Such a sentiment, already commonplace, was to be taken up self-consciously during later decades by Board schools in an attempt, along with wider strategies, to promote 'manliness' among working-class boys - part of a process designed to steer them away from 'female behaviour', as Ellen Ross (1993, 153) discusses. Stretton contrasts various paradigms of manhood, with examples of the nurturing and protective male in tension - over the range of her work and not necessarily within a single text - with the recurring motif of the domineering/manipulative patriarchal figure.

⁵⁶ In Stretton's *The Lord's Pursebearers*, the cruel Mrs. Moss has once had a child of her own, a situation which again complicates representations of parental response.

⁵⁷ Michael Booth (1965, 30) draws attention to the role of old people and small children in reinforcing the pathetic effects of melodrama.

⁵⁸ Similarly, an alliance between the child protagonist and a community of dwarves figures in Mrs. Walton's A Peep Behind the Scenes.

⁵⁹ Mayhew's reporter, Andrew Halliday, cites instances of children being sent out to beg, accompanied by younger sisters, whose 'diminutive size' drew attention and prompted charity (Mayhew, 1861-62/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 502). Mayhew also records an interview with a twelve-year-old crossing-sweeper, who is accompanied by the infant brother and sister who are in her care (288).

⁶⁰ It was common practice to assume the appearance of a respectable and deserving family unit whose members had fallen upon hard times.

⁶¹ Despite the emphasis in Stretton's work on the common cause of women and children, this represents one of a number of instances of the woman as complicit with those seeking to exploit the child rather than in alliance with the exploited child. The association of the 'real' with the wicked old woman of fairy tales is hinted at in various situations, as will emerge as my account progresses. In Bede's Charity, a lost child, who has been reading a 'fairy-book', alludes to the fairy-tale nature of her rescuer's timely appearance, while it is suggested that if any of the smaller children had been lost, 'some wicked woman would have picked them up, and taken them home with her' (Ch.20).

⁶² Mayhew's reports also tell of children lying and acting out situations. In Hardings's Luck, first published in 1909, E. Nesbit makes use, in much lighter vein, of this kind of 'dramatic performance', in which the Deptford child, Dickie, engages wholeheartedly in the 'game' of 'acting' the role of son to his tramp companion ('An' mind you call me father'), at the same time emphasising his motherlessness and exaggerating his infirmity in order to elicit sympathy and charity (Ch.2). Nesbit also foregrounds the attraction of the 'freedom of the road'.

⁶³ The inadequacies of existing legislation prompted a renewed focus on the exploitation of children as performers, in roles such as acrobat, dancer and stage fairy - attention which also reflected an increasing preoccupation with children's physical development and welfare. Campaigns were mounted by prominent figures such as Lord Shaftesbury; a plethora of articles appeared in the press and medical journals, and serious-minded narratives such as E.M. Barlee's Pantomime Waifs (1884) were published. Other fictional texts such as Mrs. Walton's A Peep Behind the Scenes (1877) had earlier drawn attention, in less graphic detail, to the pressures and perils of circus life; Silas Hocking's Dick's Fairy (1883) also centres on the plight of a badly treated orphan girl who works as a stage dancer and tightrope performer. Clearly aiming to reinforce awareness ('If folks only knew. I wonder if they do know'), in An Acrobat's Girlhood Stretton describes - in terms similar to those employed by Shaftesbury and others - the bodily contortions required of such child performers; the first-person narrator watches her sister twisting, writhing and bending her body backwards, 'as if there was not a bone in it' (Ch.2). Stretton compares the training to being 'put on the rack' like martyrs, for the amusement of others, with resultant overstraining of the body, dislocation of joints and tearing of sinews (Ch.3). The deficiencies of earlier legislation, particularly in the area of training, were eventually to be addressed in the Prevention of Cruelty Acts of 1889 and 1894. For a discussion of the debates and discourses surrounding the child acrobat/performer, and the place of this figure in the development of notions of interiority, see Carolyn Steedman (1995), especially Ch.6. Steedman suggests that 'the child as acrobat ... was a highly resonant figure for the idea of childhood shaped and forced by adult hand', with the 'strange dislocations' ... 'not simply those of the child's body but of the adult imagination too, in the uneasy understanding that what was being watched was not quite separate from the watcher' (111).

CHAPTER 4

‘WORTH HER WEIGHT IN GOLD’: SUBTEXTS OF SEXUALITY, COMMODIFICATION AND CONTAMINATION

The preceding chapter has drawn attention to the eroticisation of images of childhood and the inherent fascination with the poor child. As we have seen, adult/child boundaries are unstable and class-dependent. Clearly, issues of sexuality spill over into discussions of adult roles and representations, and my subsequent exploration of themes of gender, motherhood and outcast society will confirm the relevance of these questions across overlapping areas. In this chapter, the subject will be assigned a specific focus. I will examine the intersection of Stretton's work with contemporary debates, suggesting ways in which her writing is continually on the edge of - always hinting at - issues of sexuality, through the implications of its social/religious context, its interaction with popular discourses, and through echoes and traces in her writing. Constructions, representations and assumptions of sexuality - particularly in relation to the young woman - and the expression or containment of desire, will be discussed with reference to diverse narrative themes. The manner in which Stretton's work illuminates the interrelationship between sexuality, gender and class will emerge as central.

Recent historians have undertaken a reassessment of Victorian sexual attitudes and practices, questioning generalisations and positing greater complexity.¹ Numerous critics, engaging with the arguments of Michel Foucault, have contested a totalising concept of the Victorian era as repressive, suggesting, in contrast, the proliferation of discourses on sex and the co-existence of networks of expression and of control/discipline. Victorian discourses exhibit a preoccupation with issues of sexuality whilst simultaneously seeking to repress them. As John Maynard (1993, 145) points out, 'even the excesses of anti-sexual activity in some historical moments testify to a massive focus on sexuality'. Discourses are embedded, at various levels, within and outside texts (both literary and extra-literary), reflecting and shaping identities and cultural practice, from individual social/sexual relations to official mechanisms and

legislative procedures.² Any investigation into Victorian culture - of which juvenile literature is potentially a formative part - cannot avoid the implications of this preoccupation, which, arguably, generates counter-discourses, not least through gaps and traces. As Foucault (1981, 6) suggests, if sex is repressed, then the 'mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression'.

I use the term 'sexuality' to encompass material implications, cultural mythologies and, crucially, a blending of these elements.³ Reynolds and Humble (1993, 15) rightly endorse the need to differentiate sexual activity from the 'complex codes, ideologies and fantasies that surround it'. The entanglement of diffuse elements and anxieties is, however, central to my discussion, which embraces, for example, the elision, in the nineteenth-century imagination, of notions of sexual ignorance, goodness and purity, environmental contamination, wickedness and immorality. The fact that perceptions and representations are rooted in this conflation of ideas/meanings is significant; it is the imprecision or ambiguity within and across texts, interacting with cultural uncertainties, which may, arguably, be harnessed for diverse purposes, facilitating multiple engagement/identification.

4.1 A convergence of anxieties

Throughout my study, I foreground both conservative and potentially progressive aspects of the link between religious concepts and patriarchy.⁴ Overlapping with, and fundamental to, this connection, is the relationship between religion and sexuality. John Maynard's (1993) investigation into this relationship brings into focus both the sexual imagery at work in religious discourse, and the religious imagery which permeates discourses of sexuality. Although his study goes beyond the concerns of my project, certain crucial aspects can be applied.

If, as Maynard demonstrates, discourses of sexuality and religion intermingle in complex and sometimes celebratory ways, the impulse to separate them exists alongside and, often, above this. Strands of Western religion function in direct and violent opposition to sexuality, leading to an emphasis on repression or control/containment from particular religious and social perspectives. In examining literature written from an acknowledged religious standpoint, and with certain didactic or reformatory intentions, we might expect to identify associations, if only in their repressive or

regulatory application, perhaps drawing on parallels and oppositions for the purpose of a moral and spiritual message. In relation to Stretton's evangelical social fiction, this network of religious and sexual discourses merits closer scrutiny.

Maynard suggests that the term 'discourse' highlights the 'created, world-of-language, quality of both religious and sexual ideas' (Maynard, 1993, 4). If the relationship between religion and the construction of western social/moral codes is recognised as significant, the 'constructedness' of constituent discourses is also pertinent. Religious metaphors underpin constructions of morality, femininity and respectability, and overlap, in multiple permutations, with discourses of sexuality, the body, cleanliness, sanitation, and associated languages of social reform. The convergence of these, as I discuss elsewhere, can be identified in different settings: for example, in Kingsley's evangelical fantasy The Water-Babies (1863), and, to a marked extent, in the plethora of literature on 'Outcast London', both fictional and non-fictional (with the latter categories often blurred).⁵ Combinations of the religious, moral, social and economic are intertwined; links between states of poverty and perceptions of immorality mingle with class assumptions and fears regarding the instability of borders, to underpin attitudes, experience and disciplinary mechanisms. At the level of language, and the perceptions embedded in its conception and redeployment, the interdependence, as we shall see, is readily identifiable. As Maynard states, the tendency to focus on the connection - to link sex with sin - stems partly from 'a sense that the issue is taboo, a dirty subject put against the clean holy of holies' (5). He also highlights the central fascination in the Jesus tale of the Magdalene (5).⁶ The preoccupations and consequent language context of Stretton's 'outcast' narratives ensure the relevance of these issues, drawing attention to the concepts of duality and processes of valorisation which are reproduced or problematised within it.

My examination of gender roles and relationships - major concerns in Stretton's texts - shows these to be intimately enmeshed with representations of, and assumptions about, sexuality, and with the construction and diffusion of meanings. These links are fundamental to the operation of categories and distinctions; they are also crucial to the formation of concepts of femininity and the binary oppositions upon which normative definitions and valorisations of womanhood rest. Importantly, both gender and sexuality can be seen also to interact with class; as Lynda Nead (1988) stresses, the

definition of female sexuality in Victorian discourse was class specific, the contrast between virgin and whore connoting 'the bourgeois lady's (a)sexuality versus not simply the prostitute, but all working class women of the "residuum"' (Bland, 1981, 59-60, quoted in Nead, 1988, 7). Such designations of 'otherness' are heavily implicated in the web within which perceptions of womanhood and women's actual experiences interact. The 'good' or 'respectable' woman who embodies the acceptable norms - and often childlike qualities - of femininity is constructed as a-sexual, as naturally immune to physical passion; the 'bad' woman, constructed as 'other', is deemed naturally prone to passion and invested with an excess of sexuality. Just as the opposing images of the 'good' and 'bad' mother in Stretton's texts are, as will become clear, never far from those of the virgin and whore, so the terms 'good' and 'bad' (girl) - as ambiguous evaluations of juvenile female worth - can be read as similarly sexually charged.⁷

4.2 Kinds of knowing

Michel Foucault (1981, 30) identifies the sex of children and adolescents as an area of contention 'around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies have been deployed'. In Victorian discourse, fears surrounding sexuality coalesce in the figure of the young woman. As Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone (eds.) (1994, 8) suggest, girlhood represented - even more than today - a time of 'liminality', involving precarious boundaries between childhood and adulthood, purity and desire. Many of the non-literary writings - including medical treatises and advice books - suggest an acknowledgement of adolescent girls as 'sexual beings' (Reynolds and Humble, 1993, 15). Puberty entailed the transformation of the innocent child into the 'dangerous' pubescent girl, whose sexuality placed her - and others - at risk, and must be contained. The mechanisms by which such attempts at control operated were diffuse and overlapping, but one means was through the moral codes and assumptions embedded in literature for young people. In his history of the Religious Tract Society, Samuel Green (1899, 128), writing about the birth of The Girl's Own Paper in 1880, commented on the special literary provision needed 'for the girls of our land', and proclaimed the period of girlhood 'short and perilous'. The paper, Green emphasised, was a 'guardian, instructor, companion and friend' to its readers, preparing them for 'the responsibilities of womanhood and for a heavenly home', sentiments which echo those earlier expressed by writers such as Charlotte Yonge.

If fears about the dangers facing the young woman expressed themselves in increased parental surveillance in middle-class or certain 'respectable' working-class families, the lives of many children of the poor were inevitably characterised by a lack of surveillance, marking them out as a potential site of deviance.⁸ The offspring of the poor, as Stretton confirms in *Bede's Charity* (1872, Ch.14), were free to stay away from their homes 'as long as they will'. Such premature independence was perceived by middle-class observers as threatening, but, as I have shown, was simultaneously alluring. Leslie Williams (1994, 128), discussing the Victorians' awareness of child sexuality, observes that, although sexuality figures in the discourse on all girls, it is particularly apparent in relation to the poor. Williams (128) remarks on the class distinction implicated in the comparative absence of discourse on the sexuality of middle and upper-class children, with adult males of these classes imposing/permitting sexuality for those of inferior class, but not for their equals. We can suggest that, at the same time as serving as a distancing strategy, the sexuality implied in texts about the poor or outcast may be seen to stand in for a wider sexuality.

The work of Stretton spans, in theme and readership, the merging realms of childhood, adolescence and adulthood; it is preoccupied with spiritual issues as well as physical and moral deprivation and degradation. Inevitably, there is an overlapping of the religious/social message with notions of sexuality and sexual danger. If, as I have established, the precarious nature of the boundary between childhood and adulthood is accentuated in the case of the street child - with Stretton's Little Meg, like Henry Mayhew's 'Watercress Girl' or Barnardo's 'City Waif', a child, yet not 'childlike', 'womanly', but not yet a woman - the awareness of potential sexuality is implicit. Numerous Stretton narratives foreground the close, squalid living conditions of the urban slum or lodging-house, and it is clear that nineteenth-century commentators assumed links between overcrowding and sexual licence or premature sexual awareness.⁹ Mayhew remarks on the 'extraordinary licentiousness' of street children, suggesting that the 'promiscuous sleeping together of both sexes, the example of the older persons indulging in the grossest immorality in the presence of the young, and the use of obscene expressions, may tend to produce or force an unnatural precocity' (Mayhew, 1861-2/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 181).¹⁰ The opinions of young females reared to a street-life 'cannot be powerfully swayed in favour of chastity' (Mayhew, 177).

This assumption of sexual precocity carries particular implications for the young female, both materially and symbolically, because of the weight of society's investment in the woman as guardian or destroyer of morality.

4.3 Careers, commodification and cultural currency

Intimations of sexuality merge with wider implications, particularly in this environment. Poverty and prostitution, as Lynne Vallone (1995, 76) confirms, have long been regarded as 'common bedfellows', together forming a 'popular literary "obsession" whether in the form of entertaining fiction or sober sermons'. The context of numerous Stretton stories renders this proximity an ever-present thematic concern (if not overtly expressed, always on the point of expression); at the same time, the underlying connection secures their interactive role within the wider cultural debates/discourses. We can identify the link - sometimes ambiguous - between sexual precocity/availability and the 'waif' of many of Stretton's narratives, between the street seller of watercress or fuses and the seller of sexual favours.¹¹ George K. Behlmer (1982, 89), discussing perceptions of the child street vendor as a danger to juvenile morality, quotes from evidence to the Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls: '... there is very little difference between her and a prostitute, and sometimes these girls are more lawless, obscene, defiant in their language, than even the common prostitute on the streets' (PP 1882, XIII, QQ.98-99).

The term 'prostitute', as defined by Lynda Nead (1988, 94), is 'an historical construction which works to define and categorize a particular group of women in terms of sex and class', this process being produced through various social/institutional practices and discourses and through religious/cultural forms. Textual representations - literary and visual - contribute to the definition and regulation of female sexual behaviour. Images of the prostitute construe her as 'other', a species apart. The focus on perceptions of the prostitute in terms of sexual deviancy, social chaos and social victimisation (Nead, 1988) provides a useful reference point in discussing the interplay of attitudes in Stretton's work. My study draws attention to the common status of the prostitute (and, to some extent, the sexualised woman) and the outcast poor, as part of the 'dangerous classes'; both were construed as a political threat - a danger to the health and stability of home, to social boundaries and the very foundations of society. The

wildness of the street child - who represents the antithesis of the restrained, (supposedly) sexually innocent middle-class child in its protected domestic environment - is enmeshed with the perceived wildness of the sexualised female - and, likewise, appears at once alluring, pitiful and threatening. Although, as M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 146) claims, the 'appalling sexual precocity' of the real slum children may not be readily discernible, the lifestyle and physical appearance of the ragged and thinly clad child who figures so prominently in numerous Stretton texts carries a certain unspoken, but commonly understood subtext.

Undoubtedly, as Deborah Gorham (197, 355) observes, many slum girls turned to prostitution because their economic choices were so limited, and for Stretton's young protagonists, the material prospects are bleak. The extent and nature of Victorian juvenile prostitution - clearly a pragmatic choice for some - is, as Anna Davin (1990, 49-51) affirms, problematical; when a particular issue takes root in the popular imagination, facts are difficult to extricate from assumptions/associations. Thomas Barnardo, in 'A City Waif' (1885/6, Ch.3), writes that 'of the eighty thousand fallen women known to be passing lives of shame on our streets, not a few have been drawn from the ranks of wretched little children whose only home has been lodging houses and the streets'. Barnardo's Tracts refer to children of fourteen, or occasionally as young as ten, being drawn into the practice. Miss Mary Steer, writing towards the end of the century about rescue work, makes similar observations regarding the age of 'fallen' girls.¹² However, Judith Walkowitz states that the existence of child prostitutes under sixteen in London (regarded as the mecca for child prostitution) was vigorously denied by The Rescue Society of London, an organisation specialising in the rescue of young girls and women (Walkowitz, 1980, 17).¹³ In relation to the prominent late nineteenth-century debates, Walkowitz judges 'the throngs of child prostitutes' to be 'imaginary products of a sensational journalism intended to capture the attention of a prurient Victorian public' (17). Whatever the actual incidence, however, the association of the figure of the unsupervised girl child of the streets with that of the prostitute permeates Victorian cultural discourse.

We have seen that distinctions between male and female roles/responsibilities, in childhood and adulthood, are sometimes effaced, both according to contemporary accounts, and in Stretton's representations. At the same time, a preoccupation with the

assumed fate which awaits the working-class adolescent also points to the different prospects potentially facing the sexes, within a common state of degradation. If, as I discuss in Chapter 6.7, there is the assumption of an inevitable decline into delinquency and crime for the young male, the future of the adolescent girl growing up in an environment of poverty may also be read as inevitable. Historian Hugh Cunningham (1991, 162) suggests that for a girl, street life was 'universally thought to be fatal'; such a pronouncement has, of course, literal as well as moral implications in view of the risk of disease.¹⁴ In Stretton's In Prison and Out (1880), the vulnerability, and likely fate, in a deprived, and depraved, environment, of the orphaned slum-girl Bess is signalled, if not explicitly named: her mother fears the 'untold dangers' which lie ahead for the girl (Ch.6), and later, 'on the streets somewhere', there is 'not much chance' for her (Ch.16). The philanthropist of The Lord's Pursebearers (1883), setting out to reclaim a destitute child in London, learns 'how much more difficult it was to rescue a destitute girl from the streets than a boy'. Attractive, submissive, and more likely to arouse pity, she is 'in every way ... more profitable to her owners' (Ch.14). Not only was the threat to the young girl from such an environment construed as immense, but the link between them perceived as two-way, as exploration of Carola (1884) reveals. In the discourses of the period - in social debates, in evangelical texts generally, and in the writing of Hesba Stretton - the issue of moral/sexual contamination is continually entwined with the effects of material conditions of existence in a sometimes ambiguous causal relationship.

The material and moral future from which the girl street-child is separated by a fine thread is suggested in numerous of Stretton's characters and themes, and hinges on economic realities and constructions of sexuality and morality. As the boundary between the different street occupations is perceived as a precarious one, one profession may indicate or symbolise the other. Henry Mayhew's description of the girls gathered around the coffee-stall and his allusion to *loose* girls, again illustrates the scope for inference and elision: 'it is ... piteous enough to see a few young and good-looking girls, some without the indelible mark of habitual depravity on their countenances, clustering together for warmth' (Mayhew, 1861-2/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 86). The inadequately attired - partly exposed - body of the street-girl clearly signifies more than physical neglect and discomfort. As Seth Koven (1997, 27) concurs, the raggedness of

the nearly naked child, Bridget, of Barnardo's 'A City Waif' foreshadows the likelihood of prostitution.¹⁵ I have discussed images of the beggar girl in the artistic media, and the erotic connotations enmeshed with this image, which signals both innocence and awareness; as Koven (27) recognises, she is both 'an innocent object of benevolence' and 'the potential object of male erotic desire'. It is clear that in Stretton's description of the 'thin-sleeved' Cassy, or in the figure and attire of Jessica - scantily clothed, 'wild-faced', barefoot and hungry, her 'tattered frock slipping down over [her] shivering shoulders' (Ch.1), and often illustrated with innocent, open expression - a doubly nuanced sexuality is implicit.¹⁶ From this perspective, the gaze of the coffee-stall keeper in Jessica, and that of the reader, must be seen as *potentially* voyeuristic, constituting the child as sexual object, even as the text works, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, to promote identification and to attribute agency to her. Such representations can be identified as part of a complex network which encompasses the material and the mythological, generating tensions and conflicting subject positions.

In my discussion of the maternal (Chapter 5), I refer to the urge by Jessica's drunken mother (formerly an actress, now of dubious occupation) to abandon her to the pawnbroker - in short, to view her as a commodity to be exchanged for money. Jessica, obliged to fend for herself by begging and working as an errand-girl, is 'ill-used' by her employers. There are many forms of exploitation, but these are often linked, the dangers arguably implicit. Textual suggestions of exploitation and commercial value coalesce with discourses of erotic commodification, and intersect with literary, artistic and cultural commodification. Little Meg's premature womanhood can be seen to extend not only to the responsibilities of motherhood and the burden of economic management, but to the implied extension of such management strategies into the use of her body as currency in an economic transaction. It is perhaps significant that Meg's most treasured possession is her *red* frock - the last item to be relinquished, with great reluctance, to the pawnbroker - and that Kitty, who is clearly already involved in prostitution, intervenes with the injunction to 'run away, and I'll manage this little bit o'business for you' (Little Meg's Children, Ch.8). Patricia Demers (1991, 144) points out the alliance of the females, the sexually knowing young woman aiding and protecting the innocent and vulnerable child. Yet Meg's own emergent sexuality is perhaps even more clearly delineated than Demers suggests, and in the unflinching

treatment by Stretton of Kitty's profession - at least as pointed as that of Dickens's Nancy - issues of female sexuality in relation to prostitution are acknowledged, if not named.¹⁷

In examining childhood images, I have suggested various ways, material and symbolic, in which the child is appropriated as cultural property. The contradictory, yet entangled, interpretations of the value of the innocent or growing child in monetary terms become abundantly clear as we examine Stretton's work as a whole, with literal and symbolic valorisations constantly overlapping. The golden-haired child - 'good as any angel', regarded as 'treasure' (Ch.6) and emblematic of priceless innocence - appears in texts such as Alone in London (1869). The gold represents metaphorical worth, an expression of the value of childlike goodness or purity; it also signifies possessive relationships.¹⁸ Yet, paradoxically, the exploitation of this small child's appearance to elicit sympathy, as well as underlining begging strategies (as discussed in Chapter 3.7), already can be seen to presage the exploitation of the female body in the occupation of street-walker, and, significantly, to embody the hypocrisy of male attitudes. The waif, Tony, desires simultaneously to idolise his adoptive sister's image as innocent blonde angel, and to profit financially from her appealing looks, subjecting her to the public gaze. In a number of Stretton's texts, the pure, unsullied child is taken in death before 'environmental' contamination and moral devaluation can take place.¹⁹

Actual economic worth, ostensibly in terms of begging potential, but arguably in terms of the sexualised body of the pubescent child, is most clearly signposted in The Lord's Pursebearers (1883). Here, the 'overgrown' girl of twelve or thirteen, with her 'thick, dark hair', too-short frock, barely-covered legs and 'promise of beauty' about her, will be 'worth a mint o' money by-and-by', just as her emaciated little companion is 'worth her weight in gold' when hired out as a begging attraction (Ch.2). The commodification of the child's body, and the implicit sexuality of the female child, is foregrounded in An Acrobat's Girlhood (1889), where the young Trixy is scrutinised by the circus managers 'as if she was nothing but a beautiful animal they wanted to buy' (Ch.1) and paraded as a 'specimen' in the their quest for engagements (Ch.2). As discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, Stretton is concerned to expose the physical torture to which such child acrobats are subjected, for the amusement of fee-paying spectators. The moral and sexual implications are, however, also apparent. In full public gaze, Trixy is required,

in a blaze of light, to take up 'positions' which far exceed the bounds of modesty and decorum, and to perform in clothes so tight that her sister's face burns with shame as she watches.²⁰ Alongside the anger expressed at what is, ultimately, the murder of a child, there is the apparently compensatory message that loss of life has not, for this particular 'innocent creature', been accompanied by another, unspeakable loss - that of a young girl's virtue.

In many instances, language is manifestly ambiguous and charged. The conflation of sexual sin and wickedness is clearly signalled in Little Meg's Children, where the prostitute Kitty has 'grown up bad'; the nature of her 'wickedness' means she can now 'never, never, never be good again' (Ch.6).²¹ Certain deviant activities, as well as constituting a valid part of the narrative, can be suggested as operating euphemistically, or at least inviting elision with sexual deviance in ways which circumvent, either consciously or unconsciously, proscriptive attitudes regarding explicit description. In The Storm of Life (1876), the activities associated with the protagonist's confessed 'badness' involve housebreaking and theft. Let us, however, consider the criminal husband's suggested influence on, and exploitation of, the woman and her daughter; the 'pretty' child - in need, as she matures, of 'more care and watchfulness than ever' - will be 'of value' to, and must be hidden from, the father.²² Arguably, the underlying implications merge with the charge carried by the words 'good' and 'bad', namely that 'good' is synonymous with 'a-sexual' (and morally pure), and 'bad/wicked' may be construed as 'sexually immoral'. It is declared preferable that a child should not grow up at all rather than be exposed to these moral dangers, and vital that she should be free from the taint of her mother's background. Similarly, in waif novels such as Silas Hocking's Her Benny (Ch.3), the perception is voiced that it is better to die than to suffer the repercussions of 'wickedness' or, by inference, sexual sin.²³ Translated into the cliché of the sensation novel, the fall which awaits the young woman becomes a 'fate worse than death'. Stretton makes it clear in The Lord's Pursebearers that it is only by others foregoing Joan's imminent profitability, and, in the final resort, through escape from the corrupting and contaminating city, that the child can avoid the ultimate, unnamed but suggested fate, and thus remain 'good'.

Contemporary accounts reveal dominant - often contradictory - perceptions with regard to environmental or personal causation. 'What theft is to the evil-disposed among men,

street-walking is to the same class among women' (Mayhew and Binny, 1862, 454 quoted in Nead (1988, 108). Stretton's Kitty (Little Meg's Children) is not in the final analysis presented as evil or morally worthless, nor is she totally a victim. It seems that Kitty has chosen to be drawn from a respectable home into this immoral lifestyle, underlining the danger for all girls. Nonetheless, even without the possibility of invoking the mitigating force of economic circumstances/exploitation, Stretton's portrayal is sympathetic, giving individual identity and voice to this 'fallen girl'. This represents an adjustment of the empty stereotype; it counters the abstract and dehumanising notion of the prostitute as, in the words of Reynolds and Humble (1993, 47), a 'marker of the limits of the socially tolerable', rather than an individual, in contemporary novels. Whilst not condoning Kitty's potentially doom-laden path, Stretton, like Mayhew and Acton, here represents the prostitute as open to redemption and rehabilitation.²⁴ Remorse is required, but is engendered through example and acceptance; although shame and family ties/affection are harnessed as emotional levers, there is no suggestion of the retribution frequently demanded.

Debates, particularly from mid-century, became increasingly focused on the protection of children and young girls, the high profile given to rescue work reflecting perceptions of the child and the woman as both threat and victim. We can foreground the link between notions of childish innocence and social purity (Davin, 1990, 48) in relation to the causes of reform and protection espoused by Stretton as a founder member of the LSPCC, and which are central to a number of her texts. Narratives such as Stretton's The King's Servants (1873), engaging with these debates, chart the rescue of the fallen woman,²⁵ with her 'old-looking', 'wild-eyed' and 'terrible painted face', and her shoulders 'hardly covered' by 'dingy finery' (Part 3, Ch.7) - finery reminiscent of that worn by street-walkers like Esther in Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848). They also underline the confusion and ambivalence surrounding this figure in the Victorian imagination. In this instance, the idea of the prostitute as victim and in need of acceptance is in tension with the notion of woman's shame and the risk of moral/physical contamination - signalled by the fact that the young male rescuer must be protected by an older woman from any further physical contact: 'I thrust myself between him and her, as if to hide her from him ... I could not bear to see him so near to her'²⁶ Also emphasised is the policing of women and their position as objects of

surveillance, with the illustration of the crouching figure under the beam of the torch, reminiscent of contemporary representations by W. Gray, Gustave Doré and others (see, for example, Appendix IIs, IIv and IIw to this study), raising questions concerning rescue as protection or control. Like the street child who is re-integrated into a more conventional environment (although, for Stretton, this environment may subvert the normative ideal), the errant girl can be reintegrated into society, preferably into home and family, as happens with Stretton's Kitty.²⁷ The King's Servants, however, also engages with the question of whether, in the words of the narrator, it is 'advisable' to send 'some of our rescued girls' to America (Part 3, Ch.9), reflecting doubts about the extent of reclamation and suggesting permanent taint/risk here. Notions of the progressive influence of a better environment are in tension with the idea of separation in the export of supposedly reclaimed but ultimately devalued commodities.²⁸

M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 148) raises the question of whether readers, editors and critics missed sub-themes of prostitution/reclamation, and suggests the broadmindedness of the Religious Tract Society in supporting Stretton. Certainly, Tract Society archives reveal demands for the modification of 'sensational' material in the case of some writers.²⁹ If these editors did not require modifications to Stretton's work in this respect (there are, as discussed, instances of minor changes for different reasons), it may be that, with an eye to secularisation and hybrid markets, they judged that her work achieved an appropriate balance between exposition and intimation. The Athenaeum reviewer of The King's Servants (13.12.1873), deplored 'this specific form of sin and wretchedness being revealed to young creatures, who ought not to have their minds darkened by the shadow of such knowledge', and accused Stretton of a 'grave error in judgment'.³⁰ No doubt some readers did fail to engage with the implications, but, in view of the contemporary cultural markers, identification of these nuances and undercurrents by sections of the audience seems likely, particularly as debates over such issues as juvenile morality interacted increasingly with trends in fiction and journalism.

It is important to pursue this discussion in terms of an audience potentially encompassing a range of ages and classes, and engaging with wider changes, across classes, in notions of girlhood and womanhood. The 'hybrid' nature of evangelical writing for children has been noted. It draws on various strands of popular writing, incorporating elements which might appear antithetical. J.S. Bratton (1981, 66)

suggests that the attraction of reward stories may be partly attributable to the 'proximity of moral tales to the kind of amoral or downright corrupt material they sought to supplant', and to their willingness to employ popular story patterns (158), such as the romance form. Stretton's work owes much to the intermingling of genres, and to the blending of these with her own preoccupations. We have Stretton, the writer of evangelical texts (ostensibly for juveniles), concerned with social inequality, and Stretton, the writer of secular fiction, sharing a social milieu with authors such as Mrs. Henry Wood, and exploring - sometimes with melodramatic overtones - themes such as romantic love, bigamy and adultery. In turn, the social concerns which underlie much of her writing are entwined in various configurations with wider discourses of sexuality, morality and reform - discourses which are entangled with fears about social stability, and which harness, as we shall see, the codes and conventions of popular melodrama in relaying 'factual' information. If we consider Stretton as a writer of religious, social and popular fiction, frequently focusing on the prematurely knowing child, the adolescent or the young adult, we can see various agendas operating, sometimes in tension with one another, within and across texts.

4.4 Symbolic subtexts and sexual struggle

If sexual awareness/awakening is implicit in the poverty of certain material locations, it is also, arguably, intimated through symbolic imagery and engagement with psychological processes. In Stretton's texts, the forest carries ambiguous symbolism, at times evoking security, fertility and abundance, freedom and release; it alternately suggests desire, fear and oppression. Intimations of danger and abuse underlie the imagery.

Combined with the knowledge that Cassy has suffered physical abuse from her father and stepmother, the description of her escape through the dark, rain-drenched forest (*Cassy*, Ch.1), with its traditional fairy-tale imagery of whispering/rustling noises, creaking boughs, snapping sticks, and imagined footsteps, may carry symbolic resonance, with undercurrents articulating universal fears. The juxtaposition of the material and mythical might function to lend significance in terms of accepted cultural warnings with regard to sexual danger and adult violence. Cassy is afraid of being beaten because the 'fire would not burn'.³¹

In the narrative No Place Like Home (1881), Ishmael will shortly 'cease to be a child', and enter the perceived 'dangerous crisis' of boyhood (Ch.3). There is, arguably, a sense of the erotic - the intersection of infantile oral pleasures and pubescent desire - as Ishmael and young Elsie gather wild strawberries in the woods.³² Courting Elsie's admiration, Ishmael yearns, yet hesitates, to reveal the tunnels and subterranean paths of the old stone-quarry (reminiscent of Eliot's Red Deeps)³³ which lie treacherously below the woodland floor ('The woods were beautiful; but he knew what was hidden underground as well as what lay open to the eye of day', Ch.2). He leads her through the concealed entrance to a cave, with its closely-interwoven network of underwood, to an opening which 'led darkly into some space beyond' (Ch.2). His concern for her dress, simultaneously embodying disappointment at the limitations of her gender and, perhaps, awareness of her incipient adult femininity, precludes further exploration: 'If it wasn't for your frock, we'd go now ...' 'Couldn't I? ...' 'No it ud never do'. Childish pleasure in illicit games merges with previously expressed adult anxieties about the ending of childhood; arguably, the undercurrents might hint at impending sexual maturity, with desire awakened and suppressed. Similarly, in later texts such as The Highway of Sorrow (1894), evangelical and political themes are interlaced with the romantic elements which characterise Stretton's secular novels. Here, the presence or fear of physical desire might be read in the illicit meeting of the young lovers in a wild enchanted chasm of tangled brushwood, with its bloodstained ground and mythical association with violence and superstition (Ch.13).

In order to draw together the aspects discussed, I turn to a text which, melding diverse genres, encapsulates central aspects of the complex discourses/debates surrounding sexuality, class and gender. In Carola (1884), Stretton's writing represents not only a vehicle for instruction and improvement, but also a site of tension. The effects of this interplay, and the subject positions available, will depend on individual engagement with the novel's diverse strands, and with the conventions of popular romantic fiction. Nonetheless, I would argue that the text serves as a commentary on society's fears regarding unregulated sexuality, enacting the struggle to put pubescent sexual passion in its place, at the same time as it exposes prejudices/responses to the perceived deviance of outcast society.

J.S. Bratton (1981, 148) discusses contemporary developments in fiction directed at 'the moulding of aspirations and expectations to fit readers for a social role which was being newly defined'. Contesting her view of this process, Reynolds and Humble (1993, 32) suggest that whereas accepted conventions, particularly in the final decades, were being deconstructed in adult fiction, they were being reconstructed for girls. They note, with particular reference to the literary orphan, a conservative or reactionary tendency towards the reinstatement of the feminine ideal in texts for the adolescent (33). Although this conservative position is clearly identifiable in Hesba Stretton's texts, it is significant that the phrase 'being newly defined' does not imply a fully realised end, but a process embodying tensions. The textual enactment of struggle may permit varying interpretative emphases, as in earlier nineteenth-century works, such as Jane Eyre (1847).

Carola, in line with the trend for novels about, and directed at, the developing young person, charts the maturation of a young woman. It again embodies a convergence of religious and secular preoccupations, integrating features of the social novel, the orphan story, the tract, and romantic fiction. The text's publication in 1884 places it within a period of escalating social change and rapidly diverging views about issues of womanhood and social roles. From the 1860s onwards, as Michael Mason (1994, 119/120) notes, a wide range of texts testify to the notion of 'fast-ness' as a key issue, with impressions of girls' freedom and sexual adventurousness emphatic; the 'Girl of the Period' had of course been under debate at least since the publication of Linton's 1868 essay (reissued with other essays in an 1883 edition). New ideas regarding morality, freedom and autonomy, and the ambiguous figure of the 'New Woman', circulated to interact with dominant images of femininity and respectability, strands of feminism, and developments in social and educational reform. It was in 1884 that Stretton, displaying personal and perhaps class-based ambivalence, expressed her anxieties about the new freedoms which threatened to undermine girls' future abilities as guardians of family life (The Times, 8.1.1884).³⁴ The period saw increasingly theatricalised portrayals of outcast society and urban/moral degradation (for example, Mearns's 'The Bitter Cry of Outcast London' in 1883), an intensification of discourses of sexuality and prostitution - which were to reach their height in W.T. Stead's 1885 'The Maiden Tribute' - and a preoccupation with social Darwinism and eugenics.

In her choice of Carola as protagonist - orphaned before memory, and named after a passing barge - Stretton again displays an alliance with the marginalised figure, although, as often with these texts, the heroine is effectively one step removed from the depravity around her; she is close to it, partially involved, but not entirely *of* it. Central characters are often precariously balanced on the margins of deviance, sometimes retaining innocence even as they brush with contrary forces, sometimes crossing that boundary, but always susceptible. Here, Stretton emphasises a tug of war, with certain intangible effects. The setting is a typical, stifling 'Outcast London' community, where the very walls seem to exude corruption and immorality, and where Carola's drunken grandmother fails to protect her physical and moral welfare. Stretton's description contains all the ingredients of Andrew Mearns's portrayal of these 'hotbeds of vice and disease', of which he observes, 'Who can wonder that young girls wander off into a life of immorality, which promises release from such conditions?' Here, gin-palaces abound, 'marriage ... is not fashionable' and 'all kinds of depravity have ... their schools' (Mearns, 1883/Keating (ed.), 1976, 97/9).

Despite her construction of an environment in which Carola - on the threshold of danger - is susceptible to moral/physical contamination, Stretton also, with traces of empathy, represents the outdoor life as free and active - a world 'full of change and stir'; positive currents vie with the negative.³⁵ Carola exists like a 'wild creature', suggesting the animalistic sexuality of woman; she eats and sleeps at will, frequenting public houses and gin palaces, which, as Brian Harrison (1973, 173) confirms, were commonly associated with sexual adventure; the atmosphere appears both undesirable and perhaps alluring in its potency. The girl knows 'all the evil from which most girls are guarded, and but little of the good in which most girls are cradled' (Ch.1). As privy to this 'knowledge' which is antithetical to notions of purity, Carola represents a figure who is as close as can be dared to that of the prematurely sexually aware and potentially promiscuous young woman, with whom she is confused or elided, socially and textually.

The vulnerability of the young woman exposed to such conditions, and - significantly - at risk from her own emergent sexuality, is signalled. Her guardian, Matthias, finds her 'harder to keep an eye on' as she matures; described as a 'wild street-girl', she is tracked down and forced to attend school.³⁶ However, she 'shakes off' what Stretton

describes as the 'shackles' of school life, with its rules and regulations, to return to the excitement of her free and dangerous existence, resisting curfew or restraint (Ch.2).³⁷ Significantly, Carola has no female role model - when her grandmother dies she has no female acquaintance to ask to the funeral.³⁸

As a developing and 'pretty' young girl, possessing 'dark eyes' and 'an abundance of dark hair', Carola is deemed prey to male attention and malign influence. In her grandmother's words, 'there's not a many girls as don't go to the bad' (Ch.2); the 'girls of her class' refuse to 'brook any restraint' (Ch.5), and she is left 'free as the air'. Carola abandons Matthias's 'sanctuary' for the licentiousness of the streets, where quarelling, swearing and crime are rife, and she associates with the mobs of young men.³⁹ Significantly, despite her love of excitement, and proximity to these influences, Carola is not totally involved; she rebuffs male advances, although she does indulge in drink, which Stretton, like many reformers, identifies as compensatory and an antidote to boredom. Recognising Carola's self-will, and her emergence from childhood ('many of her street companions had lost their girlhood, and had entered upon a hard and wretched womanhood', Ch.6), Matthias facilitates a boarding-school education - reminiscent of parallel stages in the maturation of, for example, Esther Summerson and Jane Eyre.⁴⁰

The rural cottage which Carola subsequently occupies as village schoolteacher represents, at one level, an a-sexual space; it also symbolises the desirable domesticity to which, as discussed, the modern young girl, with her gregarious nature and impulse for freedom must be steered. Despite - or because of - this serene existence, traces of the former wildness exert their magnetism; once again, the vitality and spirit of the city, with its 'chances and changes' as well as its sordidness, can be seen as inviting.⁴¹ Carola suppresses memories of her old environment, which arouse excitement as well as guilt/shame. Unaware of her past, a leading young tenant farmer - like a 'prince ... come wooing' - develops an interest in her. Like Bronte's Rochester, he has eschewed the 'accomplished' ladies (Ch.13); Carola's simplicity and apparent innocence of his admiration are seductive and serve to tease.

The relationship provides, at a personal, and potentially wider level, a spiritual and moral battleground for the containment of the sexuality which Carola and her

background palpably embody, despite the text's attempts to refute its power and reconstitute her as innocent. The cottage idyll, although emblematic, at one level, of wholesomeness, might have wider implications in terms of conflated house/body images. Frustrated by her indifference, and consumed with jealousy, Philip returns late from the 'manly' - and, arguably, sexually charged - pursuit of hunting (from which Carola has attempted to dissuade him), to find: 'the gate Carola had held open for him, and behind it Carola's cottage forming a background of leaping flames' (Ch.12). The illustration (signed WLJ)⁴² which precedes the description of Philip's use of his body to break down the door ('he flung his whole weight against it; it gave way before him'), evokes the physicality of male force in an echo of Carola's struggles against the attentions of city men, even before the relevant narrative is reached. After groping his way to the inner room, and carrying the now prostrate and insensible Carola from 'the deadly peril', Philip finds his strength gone, and is trembling in every limb.

Engaging with wider discourses and generic overlap, interpretation beyond the literal content might, perhaps, suggest a rescue from the consequences of Carola's own 'knowledge' - an awakened yet dormant sexuality which is to be feared. The symbolism of fire, of course, also signifies a process of chastening/refining. Alternatively, the events embody a power struggle involving male possession, oppression and violation, the enactment or deflection of desire, or a confusion of these elements. Uncontrolled passion, viewed as destructive, poses a threat to the fabric of society. Furthermore, the house represents a site of independence and control for Carola, set apart from male authority. Arguably, the intermingling of popular codes and moral/spiritual instruction, combined with ambiguous symbolism, generate impressions, not only of resistance to, or mastery of, desire, but of residual energies which compete with the religious message. Carola's ambivalence and denial of the rescue as an automatic right to her affection suggest a battle for agency. Whether the episode suggests female power or victimisation, whether Carola is read as subject or object of the sexuality implied, is problematical, and would depend on the interpretative stance. It is also subject to definitions of power and control in relation to temptation and restraint.⁴³

Stretton, in exploring attitudes, exposes assumptions/confusions, class anxieties and hypocrisy. If Carola's schoolmistress status already renders a union with her a case of

‘marrying beneath’, reactions to the discovery of her background (a site of struggle for Carola herself) embody widespread fears and prejudices concerning the outcast classes. Values of modesty, innocence and purity, set against the perceived taint of criminality and vice (and, by extension, sexual promiscuity), combine with fears of class contamination to shape responses, demonstrating the perceived impossibility of reconciling binaries: ‘How was it possible that she could have been [the pure, innocent girl who had stolen into his heart] ... and yet have been so base a thing, so steeped in vice and wickedness?’ (Ch.19). The fact that respectability implies sexual ignorance ensures that Carola’s proximity to - if not direct experience of - uncontrolled sexuality, places her outside the boundaries of such respectability.⁴⁴ She is deemed guilty by association, and Philip will be ‘dirtied’ by contact with her. Displaying mingled pity and revulsion, his mother asserts that ‘nothing can alter the fact that she was born amidst vice and sin - amongst the lowest of the low.’ Through characters’ perceptions of vice as inborn, hereditary - a threat to family stock and the future of the race, Stretton exposes prevailing social Darwinist-inspired, imperialist-related anxieties concerning race degeneration through the effects of poverty and sexual immorality: ‘She could never... be ... wife and the mother of his children We owe some duty to our ancestors and to our descendants’ (Ch.19).⁴⁵ However, through shifting perspectives and the critique implicit in the revision of attitudes, and with Carola presented as ultimately morally superior, the narrative undermines such prejudices.⁴⁶

The threat posed by Carola’s wildness and proximity to/embodiment of immorality is ostensibly deflected and redirected through spiritual struggle, the discourse of shame, and conventional ideals of feminine worth, in terms of true love, modesty, humility and service. The resolution works to endorse the dyadic model, with the revaluation of Carola as ministering angel in a nursing role, and deferred/sublimated passion steered into its legitimate place within marriage (albeit to some extent on revised terms which include threatened social/economic ‘castration’ for Philip).⁴⁷ The containment of potentially disruptive elements renders the text ultimately conservative. Nevertheless, the representation of Carola’s experiences illustrates the pervasive power of mythologies; cultural and religious assumptions/anxieties interact to construct identities, influencing concrete responses/experiences, just as material circumstances constrain choices, actions and subjectivities. Stretton explores moral complexities, interrogates

perceptions, and allows opposing forces to make their presence felt. The reproduction of a condemnatory exposure of immorality is tempered by empathetic currents generated by the telling and personally-driven use of language, while traces of the unacceptable and exotic - as with the vicarious excitement offered to social explorers by the underworld 'inferno' - also exert a pull. The text hints at a transgression perhaps more inviting than the limited or temporary licence permitted the rebel adolescent in texts with a middle-class setting. Arguably, the underlying inscription of vitality and sexuality, together with the manifestations of otherness present in Carola, as in other texts, represent an expressive force which is in tension with restraining elements, and might conceivably function at least to trouble the conservatism of the text.

I have outlined the implications of a writer's choice of themes which embrace vice and scandal, focusing on the forbidden. Inevitably, regulatory discourses embody that which is the object of regulation. Texts which focus on perceived 'otherness', incorporate constituents of that 'otherness', potentially attracting attention and identification; the 'other' is present as alluring and desirable as well as threatening and excluded. As Maynard (1993, 12) stresses, 'sexuality is not only the defining other discourse ...; it also in effect leaks the excluded and thus amplified sexual concerns back into its system'. Stretton's texts demonstrate a frank, if partially coded, acknowledgement of issues and anxieties, both in terms of material and psychological experiences, and social/moral perceptions. Sexual desire (or its identification as temptation, threat, abuse or misuse) may represent more than a force against which the didactic aims of the writing militate - although it is that. Clearly, her narratives do operate at the level of regulation, reform and redirection, setting the spiritual in opposition to the carnal, or more positively, identifying the spiritual as substitute for the inadequate in the earthly. Nonetheless, given the possibility of alternative readings, her themes might constitute not only a warning, but, to some degree, an invitation - perhaps, in part, through the attraction of what is unspoken, but glimpsed. Opening up ideas of sexual awakening and of potentially destructive forces, her work manifests simultaneously the suppression and the residual expression of sexuality, with the possibility of releasing as well as containing energies.

¹ See, for example, the work of Michael Mason (1994).

² In my study, I have emphasised the workings of power at various levels; as Michel Foucault has demonstrated, discourses of sexuality are implicated in the operation of power relations.

³ Lynda Nead (1988, 91) quotes Stephen Heath's (1982, 3) description of 'the construction of something called "sexuality" through a set of representations - images, discourses, ways of picturing and describing - that propose and confirm, that make up this sexuality to which we are then referred and held in our lives'.

⁴ The relationship is relevant to a critique and a potentially progressive reworking of social roles, as well as to the formation/perpetuation of conservative patterns. Cultural norms - in the case, for example, of family relationships - are shown to be constructed and distorted in the shadow of biblical models, and at the same time found wanting in comparison.

⁵ See my extended discussion of overlapping rhetoric, in Chapter 6 of this study.

⁶ John Maynard (1993) reminds us that since Augustine, 'discussions of man's fallen state have been hopelessly entwined with those of concupiscence or carnal desire' (5).

⁷ The polar terms in which images of the child are constructed - with competing notions of the child as innately wicked or naturally pure and innocent parallel the 'dualistic vision' of women in general, a view which Davidoff (1995, 106) describes as the 'keystone of Christian theology, which justified the subordination of female to male on the grounds of woman's potential 'carnality'. Deborah Gorham (1978) speaks of the importance of the girl child in the shaping of imagery. She points out (370) that the familiar images of the angel-in-the-house and the fallen woman 'have their counterparts in the opposing images of the child redeemer and the wayward, evil girl'. The representations of children such as Jessica are perhaps more complex than the simple binary: they suggest the redeemer and the *potentially* depraved in the same figure.

⁸ Deborah Gorham (1978) writes that in addressing juvenile prostitution, reformers drew on middle-class assumptions regarding the possibility of monitoring young women. In fact, Gorham observes, 'the economic structure that was not only sanctioned by the dominant social class but essential to the patterns of its social life, ensured that for many late-Victorian working-class children over the age of twelve surveillance by parents was unlikely. [They] were expected to be wage-earners ...' (356).

⁹ Michael Mason (1994, 136) confirms the relationship between the focus on working-class housing and anxieties about sexual morality, concerns for reform resulting from the emphasis placed by nineteenth-century observers on overcrowding and sexual licence. He quotes Lord Shaftesbury's assumption that crowding and sexual laxity was unmistakable, and notes the prevailing imagery which likened the spread of moral corruption to contagious disease or the fierce raging of fire in confined conditions (234).

¹⁰ Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 60) writes of the vast numbers of people, of both sexes, to be found sleeping in one room, 'with no means of observing even the "commonest decency"'. Stretton, in *The Lord's Pursebearers*, points to the kind of awareness which children living in the confined quarters of lodging houses would have acquired. Proximity to the streets indicated a brand of 'knowledge' incompatible with innocence; as Lynda Nead (1988, 202) confirms, it was understood that 'female purity can only be guaranteed within the confines of the home. Outside the home is knowledge and knowledge undermines innocence'.

¹¹ The *Morning Star* in January 1867 carries a report of a lucifer seller who, unable to provide a sufficient income by that means, has fallen into prostitution. In discussing sexuality and the young girl, it is important to bear in mind that the age of consent - increased from 12 during the 1870s - remained at thirteen until the 1885 Criminal Amendment Act, when it was raised to sixteen.

¹² Miss Steer, in her chapter 'Rescue Work by Women among Women' in A. Burdett-Coutts (1893) remarks, 'I can scarcely say fallen *women*, because the larger number are in their teens, many only fourteen and fifteen years of age (158).

¹³ According to Judith Walkowitz (1980, 17), arrests for prostitution rarely listed girls under sixteen, with domestic service a common former occupation (15). (The fact that many prostitutes had formerly worked as servants appears somewhat ironic, given that reformers were keen to train street children for service.) George K. Behlmer (1982, 89), states that authorities arguably viewed street trading as more of a civic nuisance than a threat to social purity, and in fact, by the 1880s, such trading was restricted in a number of cities after dark.

¹⁴ Godfrey Holden Pike (1875, 155), writing about 'the waif's female counterpart', suggests that her sex alone is 'a crowning misfortune'. He also refers to Barnardo's encounter with a girl who, although 'of tender age', had 'well-nigh run the length of a career of shame, the seeds of a fatal disease being already sown in her constitution' (161). This period of time, of course, saw the long-running debates over social purity and the Contagious Diseases Acts.

¹⁵ Seth Koven (1997) underlines the eroticism implicit in the relationship between clothing and nudity, and the consequent erotic power of near-nakedness, which meant that the raggedness which exposed children's bodies and limbs could be interpreted as an erotic sign as well as a marker of poverty (30).

¹⁶ As suggested, the idea of innocence combined with availability comes into play (see Appendix IIe). The pose and body language suggest that the relationship is one of power and submission, although this relationship is in many respects reversed as the narrative unfolds.

¹⁷ In Stretton's Fern's Hollow (Ch.12), 'bad' Black Bess, like Dickens's Nancy, has a red gown; she also wears ornaments, such adornments arguably signalling, as with Hetty Sorrel in Eliot's Adam Bede, more than vanity/sartorial extravagance or excess.

¹⁸ Old Oliver's possessiveness in wanting this treasure to be 'his alone' evokes the obsessiveness of Silas Marner and his investment in Eppie as metaphorical gold.

¹⁹ As, for example, in Alone in London and The Storm of Life. It is also interesting to note that, although, in The Storm of Life, Rosy's half-blindness has a physical cause, the loss of her 'blue eyes' - a characteristic again associated with heavenly innocence (see, for example, Diamond's song in MacDonald's At the Back of the North Wind, 1871/1966, 246) - may have symbolic resonance as it occurs as an indirect result of her mother's 'sinfulness'.

²⁰ In her 1884 Appeal leaflet on behalf of the LSPCC, Stretton had stressed the cruelty of adults who send children out in all weathers to beg, or who torture children's bodies in order to train them for acrobats. She continues, 'and we call it vile cruelty to train up little girls to an immoral life' (2). Stretton states that the Society aimed not only to carry out practical work, but to change opinions and exert a powerful influence on the question of laws covering the protection of children against these practices, such legislation in England lagging behind that of the United States and parts of Europe (3).

²¹ Thomas Barnardo's 'A City Waif' (Ch.1) suggests that the stain can never be wholly removed.

²² We can suggest a similar euphemism or elision of ideas in The Lord's Pursebearers (Ch.14), where the girl will be 'only too useful' to the older man in his 'shameful life'.

²³ For the expression of similar sentiments, see also Dickens's Bleak House and Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth. Thomas Barnardo, in ' "God's Little Girl" ' (1885/6) refers to women pleading for rescue workers to 'save my child from being what I am' (Ch.3).

²⁴ See also Lynda Nead's (1988) discussion of the redefinition of the prostitute as pitiful social victim, as much as social threat. Such a recasting parallels the redefining, and concomitant sentimentalising, of other outcast figures which had come to be seen as symbolic of the perceived 'dangerous elements' - figures such as the street child, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. Nead (138-9) writes that such redefinition, involving a discourse of pity and compassion, forms part of an attempt to diffuse the perceived threat. W.R. Greg, in an article on prostitution in the Westminster Review in 1850 (quoted in Casteras, 1987, 133-4) suggests that '[the prostitute] is driven to prostitution by the weight of all society pressing upon her'. William Acton, in Prostitution (1857, quoted in Kincaid, 1992, 108) observes that prostitutes are 'driven' to that practice by 'cruel biting poverty'; Mayhew (1861-2/1985, 141) suggests the likelihood of young women becoming prostitutes when unable by other means to avoid starvation, a situation echoed in the Morning Star (5.1.1867) in respect of the deserted woman. The various discourses/emphases commingle and conflict in Stretton's work, underlining the conflict and confusion between naturalised perceptions/prejudices and enlightened or progressive social attitudes, between conceptions of individual moral fault and recognition of social deprivation.

²⁵ In considering metaphors of worth, it is interesting to note Murray Roston's (1996) identification of a wider symbolism in the image of the 'Fallen Woman' in mid-century culture. The image represents a 'figurative projection of a profound disquiet' (59) over the more widespread corruption of society in terms of its preoccupation with commerce and exploitation of the weak. Roston refers to the linkage of sexual prostitution with the 'immoral pursuit of wealth' (60) and society's 'selling itself for profit' (65). The prostitute's fall stands in for a more general moral and economic descent. This is particularly relevant to an examination of Stretton's work, in which the obsessive pursuit of wealth or business success often figures alongside suggestions of sexual corruption.

²⁶ Alternatively, it could be playfully suggested that lack of self-control on the part of the male might be read here. Campaigners such as Josephine Butler (Social Purity, 1879) considered it inadvisable for men to be involved in such rescue projects.

²⁷ It is significant that Kitty's mother does not reject her, as parents of 'errant' girls often did. Godfrey Holden Pike (1875, 161) writes of those who prize virtue to the extent that they steel their heart against a daughter 'on account of sin'. Miss Mary Steer (1893) writes that the object was 'the rescue of women, girls, and children from an immoral and degrading life, and often it is possible to restore those of the better class to their family and friends (149).

²⁸ There were numerous emigration projects for orphans or 'wayward' children, targeted at all ages. Stretton refers, in her chapter 'Women's Work for Children' in A. Burdett-Coutts (1893), and in her diary, in relation to gypsies, the project organised by Miss Rye and Miss Macpherson. Emigration features in numerous Stretton texts, in various contexts, offering a new life, but also serving social/political ends and, in the case of the rescued prostitutes, underlining eugenics-related strategies of regulation. In The Storm of Life, a woman philanthropist organises for strong women to find work in countries such as Australia. Mrs. Stuart Wortley, in A. Burdett-Coutts (1893, 89) refers to the sending of children to the 'happy homesteads' of Canada, but also alludes to 'reducing the burdens of overcrowded England', underlining the increased emphasis on the practice during times of particular social and economic difficulty (see Cunningham, 1991, 148), and again reflecting social Darwinist concerns. See also Stedman Jones, 1985 (309-10) on emigration and the use of the colonies as a 'safety valve'.

²⁹ An 1872 report contains the stipulation in relation to a story by Mrs. Coates that 'passages descriptive of London low life - however true ... will be modified or omitted.' (RTS/H8501, 26.3.72).

³⁰ Interestingly, a list of Stretton's works in an 1877 edition of David Lloyd's Last Will, published by H.S. King, announces the thirty-six thousandth The King's Servants with a reference only to the Athenaeum's praise of the text as a 'simple but powerful story'.

³¹ Edith in Christina Rossetti's Speaking Likenesses (also 1874) is similarly unable to make her fire burn.

³² This is perhaps suggestive of a 'sexually symbolic exchange of fruit', as discussed by Leslie Williams (1994, 128) in relation to Collinson's 'Young Sweethearts' and Millais's 'The Woodman's Daughter'.

³³ Elements of Stretton's description tally with Eliot's imagery; Stretton records reading The Mill on the Floss during 1861.

³⁴ As we have seen, ambivalence about the idea of new freedoms threads Stretton's texts, with an apparent acknowledgement in the late novel The Soul of Honour (1898) of the obsolescence of many restrictions imposed on girls and of the need for emancipation.

³⁵ Advertising reviews stressed the 'graphic', 'real' and 'powerful' nature of Stretton's narrative (The Queen).

³⁶ See Anna Davin (1990, 47) and (1996) regarding schooling and the persistent efforts of the School Board and School Inspector. Barnardo's Taken Out of the Gutter (1881) highlights the recognition by street children that the 'school master was abroad'. It became common for children to claim that they were thirteen, at which age they qualified for exemption.

³⁷ Historian Judith Walkowitz (1980, 20) writes that 'according to rescue workers and others, a wild impulsive nature, a restlessness, and a desire for independence frequently characterized the young women who moved into prostitution'. Mrs. Gaskell's Esther (Mary Barton) is perceived as possessing a 'violent and unregulated nature' (Gaskell, 1848/1987, 276). In Barnardo's Tract "God's Little Girl", we learn that towns swarm with untrained, outcast girls; one 'good-looking' girl, although only nine, is so drunk that she cannot stand, and is apparently too 'utterly wild and savage' to be reclaimed. The failure of people to ask the question, 'What will this child be as a woman?' is suggested (Chs.2 and 3).

³⁸ The importance of the mother figure in terms of moral instruction is an insistent motif in contemporary discourse, as this study emphasises. In this instance, in allocating the role of moral guardian - normally the domain of the woman - to a man, Stretton again (as with Jessica and Daniel) troubles conventional representations.

³⁹ Michael Mason (1994) refers to the wider inference drawn from the use of bad language in terms of actual immoral conduct. The moonlit riverside scenes in Carola which surround the discovery of sinister (subsequently confirmed as criminal) activity (Ch.2) evoke the atmosphere of Dickens's fiction.

⁴⁰ Such a course of action lifts the orphan above her childhood environment; despite Carola's resistance to the network of unaccustomed rules and regulations which threaten to encompass her, she now takes pleasure in learning and her training equips her to earn her own livelihood as a village schoolteacher. Clearly, without some financial independence, whatever the source, there is little prospect of escape from the lifestyle of the slums.

⁴¹ We have seen in Chapter 1 that Stretton, like Carola, abhorred boredom, physical confinement and conformity; we have also noted her ambivalence regarding the merits of town and country, and about London in particular, with views fluctuating between extremes of repugnance - as expressed early on, and approval.

⁴² In the editions consulted. See Appendix IIg to this study.

⁴³ Feminists such as Frances Power Cobbe considered that being a slave to one's passions contributed to being in slavery to men; emancipation was thus, from this perspective, associated with self-control rather than sexual self-expression.

⁴⁴ See Michael Mason's (1994, 139) discussion of sexual moralism as an important aspect of the ideal of domestic respectability, with consequent antagonism to the moral taint associated with prostitution. Stretton refers elsewhere to the 'wealth' of a good name, again underlining the appropriation of economic symbolism. Carola's solitary independence is also a factor which provokes assumptions about her past behaviour among those who are unacquainted with her: 'a mystery about a young and pretty woman is always to her discredit' (Ch.24). In Stretton's The Doctor's Dilemma, it is suggested that such a mystery usually involves shame (Part 2, Ch.20).

⁴⁵ Sally Shuttleworth (1992, 36), discussing Victorian gender ideologies, observes that marital selection directed towards the amelioration of class and species was a persistent topic of debate well before Darwin's Descent of Man (1871). The latter part of the century, however, saw a heightened interest in eugenic concerns and anxieties about the 'purity' of the nation.

⁴⁶ Perhaps, once again, indicative of Stretton's belief in the overall superiority of women, as articulated most emphatically in The Soul of Honour

⁴⁷ Significantly, Carola is able to survive independently, and closure can only take place after Philip and his family have been threatened with a fall in status, arguably representing a form of castration, reminiscent of the ubiquitous Jane Eyre model. Furthermore, Carola is shown to be an agent of spiritual and social change, and the sense of her autonomy - although in tension with the perceived need for her to be tamed - is powerful, with religious strength again making possible a certain lack of dependence on men.

CHAPTER 5

VERSIONS OF WOMANHOOD: PERSPECTIVES ON MOTHERHOOD AND GENDER

In her preface to Woman's Mission (1893), a collection of Congress Papers by women philanthropists, Baroness Burdett-Coutts charts the phases which characterise the development of human (in this case, female) life. Progress is marked by the gentle unfolding of infancy into childhood, the blossoming of the child into the girl, and the passing of girlhood into 'responsible womanhood' (xii). Clearly, these stages are overlapping, the implications of each, and the smooth passage from one to the other, intertwined. The present study has directed a searchlight onto the figures of the child, the young adult, and, in particular, the sexualised female; now, in line with the shifting focus of Hesba Stretton's narratives, closer attention will be paid to the situation and perspective of the wife and mother. This chapter will highlight Stretton's engagement with dominant discourses and representations of motherhood, and incorporate a wider, overlapping, discussion of gender roles and relations. It will explore the reinforcement and mediation of difference in respect of the persistent construction of woman as 'other', not only in relation to the male sex, but also within the ranks of womanhood. The continued relevance of themes already broached, and the relationship of Stretton's work to a range of contemporary representations, will become apparent. Issues of class, poverty and morality are once again enmeshed with questions of gender and sexuality; at the same time, the operation of power relations, within and across classes, emerges as a significant factor.

Stretton, in her own contribution to Woman's Mission ('Women's Work for Children', 1893, 4), suggests the division of the world into, on the one hand, 'men', and on the other, 'women and children'. My investigation will further explore the particular relationship between women and children, underlining their joint position on the margins of male-dominated culture. The intense bonds, intersecting concerns, and shared subordination of these mutually dependent figures is powerfully articulated in

Stretton's work; motifs of the outcast mother and child abound in her narratives, resonating with wider literary and artistic images of shared exclusion.¹

Writing on the subject of motherhood and representation, E. Ann Kaplan (1992, 6/7) usefully locates the mother, for purposes of analysis, within several distinct representational spheres, which include the historical, the psychoanalytic and the fictional.² Importantly, these spheres are interlinked. As I have discussed in relation to representations of childhood, such categories are overlapping and mutually reinforcing; my discussion embraces aspects relating to each, and highlights their interdependence. In line with Kaplan's view, it can be suggested that 'since the level of the fictional lies at the intersection of the other two levels (i.e. the historical, the psychoanalytic), traces of those levels exist within the different kinds of discursive texts under study, and enter into the analysis' (7). This section of my study will address material and metaphorical aspects of mothering, and explore the psychosocial implications of the maternal relation. I will demonstrate that Stretton's texts, blending melodrama, realism and political comment, juxtapose alternative paradigms of the wife and mother, as well as different perspectives on maternal loss and separation. Arguably, her work incorporates qualities identified by Kaplan as indicative of a 'resisting' text, as well as elements recognisable in 'complicit' examples.³ Stretton's strategies both invite identification and facilitate interrogation, implicitly foregrounding and often overtly critiquing women's oppressive positioning under patriarchy. Once again, cultural myths, perceptions and representations, social discourse and practice, together with material and psychological experiences, operate within a multi-directional network and are implicated in the construction/formation of individual and collective identity.

5.1 The worth of a mother

It is clear from the multiple patterns of relationship identified in Stretton's narratives that social definitions of the 'mothering' role are problematised; 'parenting', 'family' and 'home', as we have seen, may take many forms, challenging traditional paradigms. The artificial nature of prescribed gender roles is exposed, and, in numerous instances, Stretton's themes interrogate the dominant conception of woman/biological mother as nurturer. At the same time, they reinforce the importance of a 'nurturer', whether or not this role traverses age or gender boundaries.

Stretton, nonetheless, displays an unmistakable concern for the situation (both concrete and symbolic) of the woman as mother - and, indeed, of the mother as woman. The issue of maternity implies a double bind: it represents 'one of the pillars of patriarchal domination of women and one of the strongholds of female identity' (Braidotti, 1989, 96). Whilst motherhood is assigned ideological centrality, it is, at the same time, profoundly marginalised. Within Stretton's exploration of the maternal condition, contradictory perspectives are at work, affording insights into the complexities of motherhood and gender relations. This study has shown that idealised images of childhood and youth are set against, and mingle with, alternative representations of the child and adolescent. Likewise, models of the ideal wife/mother are juxtaposed and blended with other versions of the female and maternal role. Just as comparisons are made between fathers, so there are diverse and conflicting images of the mother, which both endorse and complicate traditional conceptions and expectations. The multiple representations of women in Stretton's texts - fusing and setting in opposition the material and the spiritual - can be seen to intersect with wider cultural mythologies, and to engage with contemporary currents of debate. Stereotypical portrayals are undercut by less simplistic representations, with the effect of raising questions and revealing anxieties.

Stretton's narratives suggest motherhood as potentially fulfilling, empowering and resistant, worthy of respect or even veneration. At the same time, maternity emerges as a form of entrapment in which the woman is constrained by the physical realities, the spiritual/sacrificial connotations, and the cultural expectations/limitations of the role. Stretton herself highlights the dominating influence within the Christian religion of the idea of 'Mother and Child' ('Women's Work for Children', 1893, 4). This iconography is, of course, widely reflected in art and literature, its intensity powerfully experienced in life. The notion of the mother as Madonna - and the consequent emphasis on the spirituality and value of motherhood - permeates culture at all levels, from its basis in the purely religious sphere to its gradual incorporation into general images/qualities of domestic motherhood.⁴ Such associations are ideologically charged, harnessed for wider purposes; women's role as reproducers of the social order has been generally acknowledged as a factor underpinning patriarchal society. E. Ann Kaplan (1992)

points to the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the discourse of motherhood. The new focus on the child produced an emphasis on the mother 'in her role as there specially to care *for the child*'; by virtue of her 'skills in emotions and relationships', she was seen to fulfil the crucial function of 'cementing' the family (20). During the Victorian period, the role of wife and mother assumed a new social significance; essential to the 'construction and perpetuation of domestic and social order', the woman, as guardian of the home, was 'catapulted to the top of a new moral hierarchy' (Nead, 1988, 24/25). It was, indeed, largely because of the danger that it would undermine the nurturing capacities of girls of the lower classes, and thus 'unfit' them, specifically, for 'patient' and 'gentle' *motherhood*, that the growing love of freedom cited by Stretton (The Times, 8.1.1884) provoked so much anxiety. Likewise, it was the provision of suitable 'mental food' for 'build [ing] up' women as 'the future wives and *mothers* of [the] race' (italics mine) which particularly preoccupied critics of juvenile literature such as Edward Salmon (1886c, 526).⁵

If the orphan or waif figure signifies alienation and the loss of certainty in a changing world, the maternal figures as the site of comfort, security and stability. The mother represents the primal shelter, the ultimate refuge: the child 'whose face is hidden in [her] close embrace' no longer sees the terrors which have driven it to that place (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.55). The value placed upon the 'good', respectable and nurturing mother means that failure to live up to the ideal has severe consequences in terms of society's censure. Images in Stretton's texts carry the weight of all the symbolism invested in the concept of motherhood. The polarised valorisations of 'good' and 'bad' mother are illustrated - and sometimes conflated - in diverse and conflicting representations, and at various levels.⁶ Stretton's work ostensibly underwrites notions of the ideal mother as nurturer and spiritual/moral example and guide, transmitter of positive cultural values.⁷ The need for, or memory of, a mother's instruction - suggested as a powerful guiding and protective force in the early The Children of Cloverley (1865) and other Stretton narratives - is central to countless contemporary works, from the fiction of Mrs. Gaskell to juvenile texts such as L.T. Meade's Scamp and I (1877), this iconic and formative influence often preserved and intensified by bereavement.

Yet, the lack of a mother, or of a mother's care, has, as we will continue to discover, far-reaching implications for the child's emergence as an integrated and morally/socially acceptable being. Deprived of maternal companionship and guidance, 'motherless girls cannot be too careful in their conduct' (Stretton, 'The Postmaster's Daughter', 5.11.1859, 40).⁸ In texts such as Stretton's No Place Like Home (1881) mother and home are conflated (overriding the presence of a harsh and drunken father) as prime socialising force and supporting strength - a perception shared by contemporary commentators such as Benjamin Waugh. Similarly, the actions of David, protagonist of Stretton's In Prison and Out (1880), are motivated by concern for his mother, his reaction to imprisonment conditioned by the effects upon her of his incarceration. In a violent home, the restraining influence of a mother is recognised; it is acknowledged that Cassy had 'only got her mother, as kept her father tolerably decent' (Cassy, 1874, Ch.3).⁹ Straightforward comparisons between different kinds of mother are drawn, as in the case, for example, of the responsible and caring surrogate maternal figure, who stands in opposition to the neglectful and slatternly biological mother in Lost Gip (1873). In such cases, the textual comparison of 'types' of women in terms of character may serve to conceal class difference/material circumstances, thus depoliticising distinctions; the social implications, however, are never far from the surface.

Just as we have identified motifs of the virgin and whore in representations of the young woman - and even the child, we can recognise parallels, and overlapping imagery, in the manner in which differences are constructed between versions of the wife and mother. If the normative maternal role is inscribed with a civilising and humanising power, some mothers are, by contrast, perceived as barbaric and in need of being civilised. In this respect, the links between domesticity and virtue, slovenliness and immorality emerge as central. The eagerness with which reformers, including Stretton, set about transforming 'female street wanderers' into 'well-trained domestic servants' - coupled with perceptions of the incompetent housewife as 'among the sorest evils of our day' (Pike, 1875, 157) - points up associations between the fallen girl and the slatternly wife, once again underlining the conflation of the domestic and the moral. We can see that it is in direct contrast to the virtuous and respectable domestic ideal - incorporating the connotations of purity, love and sacrifice rooted in traditional religious iconography -

that the 'dissolute' slum mother, symbolising all that is unregulated and degenerate, is invoked in discourses of class and gender. If 'woman' is already constructed as 'other' or 'excess' - a threat to patriarchal order, the slum mother, like the fallen woman, is created as another level of 'otherness', providing a further screen for the projection of the unacknowledged and undesirable.¹⁰

This study has pointed to the 'dramatisation' of poverty and street life across fictional and non-fictional forms, and its significance in the shaping of attitudes and perceptions during the Victorian period. It is relevant to representations of both the woman and the mother in Stretton's writing, which, as we have seen, draws on melodramatic elements of popular culture. The ubiquitous motif of the destitute child has been highlighted; clearly much of Stretton's work centres on, and refracts this image. Ellen Ross (1993, 21) refers to the expansion of 'London poverty's cast of literary characters' to embrace, as well as figures such as the street-seller and the fallen women, the mother of a family. Juxtaposed with an upsurge of interest in the mother as 'object' of concern and investigative study, can be found the vilification and dramatisation of this figure, conflating social, scientific and mythological notions. Many shades of this 'dramatic' player feature in Stretton's stories, representing a spectrum which spans the pathetic to the resilient or flamboyant; in different guises, and sometimes in the same character, the mother stands admired, reviled, pitied and understood.

The image of drunken irresponsibility which attaches to the mother figure in the 'Jessica' narratives, and which is central to stories such as Lost Gip, mirrors stereotypical perceptions which find increasing expression in novels, 'melodramatic' temperance tracts, journalistic articles and visual texts, as the Victorian period progresses. Associated with the transmission of solely negative values, this image represents the antithesis of feminine respectability, maternal propriety and nurturing qualities. The terms in which the drunken woman is evoked in Stretton's texts ostensibly endorse this 'otherness'. They echo apparently unsympathetic descriptions such as that given through the eyes of Stephen Blackpool in Dickens's Hard Times (1854), which highlights the tattered filth of the woman - her tangled hair, her slumped, grovelling pose and moral baseness.¹¹ Such portrayals feed into a continuing discourse, the images and implications becoming intertwined and firmly implanted in the public imagination, consolidating notions of the woman - even (or especially) in the figure of

the mother - as potential destroyer as well as preserver of morality and civilised society.¹²

The image of the cowed, crouching, or drunken female recurs in various media representations.¹³ Such characters lack individual identity, being frequently referred to by one of the negative epithets appropriate to their situation; it is noticeable that Jessica's Mother has no name other than that of her maternal role. It is, nonetheless, this role/identity which constitutes the title of Stretton's sequel, representing, in theory, a reinstatement of the figure absent from Jessica's First Prayer, who is now to be given a voice. Yet, it can be argued that the mother is simultaneously present in, and, in a sense, 'absent' from the text - central to the concerns of the story, yet excluded from it, just as she remains excluded from society; as Jessica's protector, Daniel Standring, hastens to tell her, she does not 'belong'. The woman represents a figure necessary as 'other', an object whom Stretton intermittently attempts, but ultimately fails, to reconstitute as subject, and who must finally be textually renounced, cast out from the narrative.

The woman's fate evokes the downward spiral of degradation associated with the evils of drink, as represented in pervasive images of the 'gin-sodden woman', and as caricatured by Cruikshank in the dramatic sequences contained in the series The Black Bottle (1847) and The Drunkard's Children (1848).¹⁴ Jessica's mother's flight culminates in a 'fall' and apparent drowning, in a manner reminiscent of Cruikshank's illustration of the fallen woman throwing herself into the river from a bridge - one of many contemporary evocations of the 'river suicide'. Such representations, as Lynda Nead (1988, 170) discusses, had, by the 1860s, become clichéd, merging in the popular consciousness, and participating, along with widely circulating journalistic and artistic representations, in the formation and perpetuation of the myth of the fallen woman.¹⁵ Stretton imparts certain details - charged with unspoken implications - about the background of Jessica's mother: the woman, once associated with the theatre, and having at some time enjoyed a more luxurious lifestyle, now exists on the streets. In other Stretton narratives, London bridges figure as locations of despair, with the river as ultimate solution: of the various undesirable, but inevitable, fates awaiting uncared for girls such as Cassy, 'the river's the best' (Ch.3). Like Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth, the 'fallen'

Kitty in Little Meg's Children (1868) contemplates death by suicide; the rescued 'painted-faced' young woman of The King's Servants (1873), found near a riverside passage, is 'drenched with rain, or perhaps with the troubled waters of the river' (Part 3, Ch.7). In the suggested manner of Jessica's mother's death, the motif of the bad mother and the prostitute/fallen woman converge in a typically melodramatic representation, in which these overlapping constructions are implicated:

He stretched out his hand towards her, but she pushed it away, and with a groan of despair she fled from the light, and sought to hide herself in the darkness of the foggy streets. ...But she kept on until Daniel found himself at the entrance of one of the old bridges of the city which span the wide waters of the river. Side by side with it a new bridge was being constructed, with massive beams of timber, and huge blocks of stone, and vast girders of iron, lying like some giant skeleton enveloped in the fog, yet showing dimly through it by the glare of red lights and blazing torches, which were kindled here and there, and cast flickering gleams upon the black waters beneath, into which Daniel looked down with a shiver, as he paused for a moment in his pursuit.

But he had lost sight of the woman when he lifted his eyes again, unless the strange dark figure on one of the great beams stretching over the river was the form of Jessica's mother (Jessica's Mother, Ch.9).

Yet, to conclude that Stretton's overall portrayal serves merely to underwrite melodramatic stereotypes is to underestimate the contradictions at work within the narrative. The text's presentation of Jessica's mother is, at times, ambivalent, foregrounding uncertainties and inequities. J.S. Bratton (1981, 87) observes that, through the eyes of Standring, the woman is presented as disgusting. However, whilst Daniel's perspective initially invests the representation with all the dominant associations of filth and degradation, the effect is complicated not only by the exposure of Daniel's unloving attitude, but also by conflicting currents which intermittently surface. In Jessica's First Prayer, the indictment of the mother's neglect is momentarily offset by the humorous description of the woman's assertiveness. The straightforward confidence of the child's declaration contributes a positive and admiring note which, perhaps, subverts its implied naivety, endorsing the anarchic response to authority:

"She'd not hearken to you, sir. There's the missionary came, and she pushed him down the ladder, till he was nearly killed. They used to call mother the Vixen at the theatre, and nobody durst say a word to her" (Ch.8).

Here, Jessica's mother is presented as far from weak or passive; arguably, she represents a potential threat to established institutions, which, the tone suggests, are being mocked.¹⁶ Despite the detachment which Jessica, like Sandy in Lost Gip, at times displays towards her mother, the child acknowledges - with what Stretton, in Hester Morley's Promise (Ch.57) describes as 'steadfast childlike loyalty' towards a parent - the dues which relate to the maternal role. Regardless of conduct, as 'my mother', she is deserving of affection, support and allegiance. Under Jessica's influence, Standring's abhorrence turns to pity, emblematic of the range of social attitudes implicated, as well as the spiritual softening of his heart.¹⁷

Victorian discourses of religion and morality associate drink with sinfulness and moral contagion, and often present it as a prime cause of poverty. From the perspective of reformers, material conditions were recognised as generating recourse to the bottle, but, again, ambivalence regarding cause and effect is identifiable. As we have seen in relation to other figures, there is, in Stretton's work, a complex interweaving of elements which apparently hold in balance a picture of moral degradation and one of social deprivation. Intermingled with the allusions to sin and depravity in which the narrator's voice appears complicit, is the understanding of the effects of material poverty and environment on the situation of the woman as mother, and the strains which conspire to lead her to the path of degradation. Charles Booth, in his study of London poverty (cited by Davin, 1996, 22), recognised that the drunken woman, as well as the man, was likely to 'drag her family down', but also that 'Marriage is a lottery, and childbearing often leads to drink'. Jessica's mother declares that she has been 'driven to it' (Jessica's Mother, Ch.5), a phrase which suggests a recognition of the influence of economic and environmental forces.¹⁸ And, surely, for some readers, the woman's sense of the injustice of her separation from her child - whatever its causes - might serve to underline the role which this loss (representing a denial of motherhood) plays in accentuating her despair and precipitating her downfall.

Underlying the resolution of Jessica's First Prayer are the conflicts of interest and the forfeiture of rights which inevitably arise from the need to ensure protection of the child. When enquiries regarding the whereabouts of the mother of his 'adopted daughter' are unproductive, Daniel relishes the fact that 'there was nobody to interfere with his charge of Jessica' (Ch. 10). The satisfaction expressed at the prospect of a path

unhindered by such 'interference' implies a 'naturalised' assumption that not only the woman's failure to provide, protect and nurture, but her unwillingness to permit the child access to school or church, justify the course of action. A mother's absence is construed as preferable to what is inevitably perceived as her malign influence, a fact echoed by the child protagonist in Lost Gip. The increasing intervention of reformers and state, in their adoption of a parental role, is reflected in the latter novel. Here, Stretton reveals that arrangements for the expedition to Canada of apparently orphaned children are made with seemingly little enquiry into the rights of any family, reflecting trends which are, of course, only now being interrogated. Stretton's concern for the welfare of the child - and anger towards the mother on behalf of that child - vies with, and overrides, understanding or sympathy for the lot of the woman. At the same time, society's disregard for the mother is, arguably, exposed; the contradictions within these texts serve both to undermine and to accentuate the maternal perspective, potentially generating shifting/competing subject positions.

Conflicting responses to maternity throughout Stretton's work illustrate the interplay between symbolism and practice, the mismatch between cultural expectations and material experience. In her early story, 'The Lucky Leg' (19.3.1859), various attitudes to the ties of motherhood are expressed in a somewhat satirical exchange of views. One stance is represented by the assertion that 'a woman's nature is only half developed till she is a mother'.¹⁹ Similarly, in The Clives of Burcot (1867, Ch.26), motherhood is identified as 'the perfection of a woman's happiness', a normative assumption which evokes Foucauldian notions of the use of pleasure rather than constraint in the establishment and operation of social/power relations. This view of motherhood as consummation represents an ideal, perhaps predominantly middle-class perception - part of a socially constructed, normative myth of femininity; Stretton makes it clear in other texts that in different situations, and in different social/economic circumstances, this ideal is severely undermined and compromised. For many women, motherhood entails untold burdens.

For critic Julia Kristeva (quoted in Ross, 1993, 4) the mother represents 'the threshold on which nature and culture confront one another'. For Victorians, motherhood, as Lynda Nead (1988, 26) confirms, was seen as 'the most valuable and *natural* component of woman's mission' (italics mine), and maternal love as the 'apex of

feminine purity'. Ross, in turn, sees 'only a little which is truly "natural" about an institution so embedded in social and cultural practices' (Ross, 4). Stretton's narratives increasingly confront and re-examine the implications of women's role as mothers, even as they simultaneously reaffirm normative perceptions in the face of social anxieties. A case in point is her exploration of the possible reasons for the disappearance of the eponymous 'Gip', a theme which reflects contemporary concerns surrounding rates of infanticide. Lost Gip engages with mid/late nineteenth-century debates generated, in part, by the 'medicalisation' of aspects of motherhood, and the diffusion of scientific ideas about the existence of a 'natural' maternal instinct.²⁰

Hesba Stretton's work clearly participates in this public concern. Whilst her texts appear to underwrite maternal love as instinctive, they also highlight the role of social deprivation and moral decline in undermining this norm. Stretton evidently endorses the view expounded by Arthur Leared in Infant Mortality and Its Causes (1862, 10, quoted in Matus, 1995, 158) that 'the voice of nature is strong enough to speak for the child to the mother's heart until stifled by vicious habits, or crushed out by absolute want of the necessities of life'. In the opening pages of Lost Gip, the narrator provides social comment on the loss of 'natural love' by mothers. After describing the atmosphere in the courts and alleys of London's East End, Stretton writes of the near inevitability of infant death under these conditions - with funerals 'so frequent they excite no notice' - and seeks to explain the relief associated with hardship and the apparent erosion of feeling:

As for the mothers, the greater portion of them seem to have lost their natural love for their little ones, and are glad to be rid of a care which would have made their lives a still heavier burden to them (Ch.1).²¹

In Jessica's First Prayer, the mother yearns to rid herself of her daughter along with the pawned furniture (Ch.3) - a construction of the child, not only as currency, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, but also as disposable object. In Lost Gip, the possibility that the child's mother has intentionally disposed of her is made explicit in the gossip and insinuations of the neighbours: 'One or two hinted that maybe she had been made away with as a trouble' (Ch.3). Despite his recognition of maternal neglect - that he is, in fact, better off without his mother - Sandy is reluctant to believe her capable of murdering her child; he is reassured by his substitute mother that 'it's not in a mother's

nature'. The laboured temperance message, however, is that the most natural of instincts can be overruled by the effects of drink. Although he defends her as not 'a partic'ler bad mother ... It was all drink as did it' (Ch.7), Sandy repeatedly finds difficulty in reconciling the image of the drunken woman with his (or society's) expectations of what a mother should be. Similarly, the young adult Cor (Bede's Charity), looking back on his own mother's failings, finds it 'strange that such women should have children given to them' (Ch.11). It would seem that Stretton likewise struggles, even as she attempts to promote understanding, with internalised perceptions that certain women are inherently 'unfit' to be mothers.

If, as Kaplan (1992) points out, the appearance of the victimised working-class mother was largely confined to the context of didactic polemics against the evil effects of alcohol on the family (89), Stretton's texts, whilst participating in that discourse, provide other contexts for the inclusion of the working-class woman/mother. Unlike the mothers of Jessica or Sandy, other women are represented by Stretton as deprived but not depraved - widowed or deserted rather than completely 'fallen'.²² As upright slum mothers, they - like other Stretton outcasts - are set apart, distanced from the 'bad' (unmarried or otherwise degenerate) mother, placed as objects of concern and pity rather than figures of shame. Both this crucial difference, and the proximity of one figure to the other, are brought into sharp focus in her work, and perhaps symbolised in In Prison and Out, where the pawning of a widowed mother's wedding ring makes her feel like 'one of those wretched creatures on whom she had always looked down with honest pride, and a little hardness' (Ch.4).²³

The extreme hardship experienced by women and mothers, particularly those who are unsupported, and perhaps have responsibility for the care of several generations, is repeatedly reinforced in Stretton's work. If all women are marginalised, those of the poorer classes are doubly so. There is a recognition that the sacrificial contract between mother and society implies emotional/physical, if not moral, decline for the woman, to be offset against the benefits to society which accrue from the duty and commitment implicit in the role.²⁴ The mother of the central protagonists of In Prison and Out continues, despite terminal illness, to sacrifice her own needs and to support her family until her physical condition renders this impossible. Stretton makes it clear that the woman's self-sacrifice, following accepted patterns of maternal altruism, precipitates

her decline. Even in a situation of less extreme poverty, such as that experienced by the more 'respectable' working-class substitute mother in Lost Gip, it is the woman who, unnoticed, deprives herself of proper nourishment, confining herself to eating dry bread while her husband enjoys a 'comfortable and tasty breakfast' (Ch. 11).

The sacrificial element inherent in the maternal bond exposes the mother to possible threat and blackmail. Stretton demonstrates that motherhood, and a woman's love for her child, can be used as a lever by agents of power, and operates to constrain women's choices. The separation of children from their mothers (In the Hollow of His Hand, 1897) is employed as a powerful tool of coercion by the Church Authorities, in the attempt to force Stundist women to recant their 'heretical' beliefs: 'Give me the children, and the mothers will follow' (Ch.8). Representing a severance of the most fundamental kind - the rupture of primal ties - such a parting has the potential to break a child's heart and to drive a woman insane with grief. In The Storm of Life (1876), the protagonist, Rachel, submits to her husband's authority, suffering oppression in order to safeguard her child from his exploitative designs; there seems no option but to 'buy her child's safety by the sacrifice of herself' (Ch. 15). In feminist rhetoric, religious belief is often implicated in promoting women's complicity in their own subjection. This mother's faith - although it results in her own silence and suffering - represents a powerful source of resistance to her husband's intended strategy. Rachel's determination, however, entails a self-enforced separation from her child, and the daughter's safety (and virtue) cannot, in fact, be guaranteed without the ultimate sacrifice: despite Rachel's repentance, only her death permits freedom 'from the chain of her past sins' (Ch. 19). Here, the 'good' and 'bad' woman are conflated in the same character, with the overall treatment largely sympathetic. Redeemed by her determination to be 'good' - the archetypal Magdalene sinner who repents of her 'badness' - the once depraved woman gains the status of 'angel', becoming, like Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth, an icon of spirituality. However, the religious/moral message is entwined with Stretton's representation of the material experiences of the mother. The equation of social deviance with 'sin' is combined with an understanding of the conditions which engender patterns of behaviour, and of the consequences for wives and children of male oppression and aggression. In contrast to notions of Eve as the initiator of transgression, men are proposed as the instigators of this chain of sin;²⁵

Rachel asserts that it was 'my husband's fault, mostly', continuing, 'Men are so; they don't care for their children like we do' (Ch.2).²⁶

Whilst abhorring the neglect of a child by her mother, Stretton, as suggested, clearly recognises that the fate of the child is entwined with the position of the woman.²⁷ Her factual accounts confirm an acute awareness of the pressures facing poverty-stricken women bread-winners, who, like the protagonists of her stories, are sometimes 'compelled to lock [their babies] up all day, without food and fire', whilst they earn their bread and shelter ('Women's Work', 1893, 7). One such woman is confronted with the most painful of dilemmas in the narrative Left Alone (1876), the absence of any family or community support making it inevitable that she must neglect the child in her charge in order to provide for it.

The gulf between ideal and reality forms a persistent undercurrent. If some portrayals are harsh, the transgressive or misguided mother figure is increasingly treated with a degree of understanding; condemnation is tempered with insight and compassion, the background to events explored.²⁸ When a mother's despair is total, driving her to abandon her responsibilities, as in the case of Hagar (A Thorny Path), she is not spared the consequences, or the guilt inspired by her action. However, the woman's dilemma is recognised, the contributory factors exposed; she has 'toiled and slaved', 'gone hungry and famished herself', sacrificing her own portions, before she arrives at the point of desperation (Ch.1). On impulse, she flees, throwing off her 'burden' - a burden patently beyond endurance. The understanding of Hagar's motivation again highlights the social conditions which influence moral decisions. It throws into relief society's failure to acknowledge fully the constraints and effects of poverty, and at the same time evidences the commonplace displacement of economic causality by a discourse of morality. Stretton's representations undermine perceptions of sin and moral failure as clear-cut. Unlike the mothers of Jessica and Sandy, or the protagonist Rachel in The Storm of Life, Hagar (having, perhaps, 'atoned' through the loss of her baby in a tragic accident) is given a second chance, with the promise of a better earthly life in her eventual marriage.

In Cassy, which deals with a woman's selfish abnegation of responsibility, we can likewise detect competing currents, which perhaps facilitate wider subject positions and

make a definitive reading elusive. The fecklessness of the employer, Mrs. Tilly, and the exploitation of the child are foregrounded; the foolishness of building castles-in-the-air is exposed. At the same time, the implied condemnation of Mrs. Tilly's consumption of romantic fiction - with its 'high-flown romances' and 'several murders' - is juxtaposed with a hinted understanding of her recourse to this denial of, and escape from, reality - a reality where monotony, poverty and abuse loom large and aspirations are permanently thwarted.²⁹ Complex metafictional processes are at work within this text, which engages with widespread contemporary censure of women's novel reading, demonstrating the dangers inherent in the practice. In so doing, as Kate Flint (1993, 149) observes in relation to such admonitory literature, it 'turn[s] the consequences of reading fiction into a narrative itself'. Importantly, there is an implicit acknowledgement of the power for action - however morally dubious - generated by Mrs. Tilly's absorption of the ideas contained within the novels she reads.³⁰ Moreover, we can suggest a playful self-reflexivity in Stretton's allusions to such reading matter, with references to the situations and codes of romantic fiction foregrounding intertextuality. An element of ironic self-parody - and perhaps a mockery of overly critical stances towards such fiction - can be posited, given Stretton's own novelistic aspirations and incorporation of romantic themes. The ingredients identified in Mrs. Tilly's fiction were among those highlighted in reviews of Stretton's own work (see Chapter 2.5 of this study). Such underlying ambiguity arguably works to undermine disapproval; the blending of serious concerns - such as maternal neglect - with currents of playfulness and wider consideration of women's issues, serves to unsettle.

Mr. Tilly's thought processes in rationalising his own departure (viewed as romantically mysterious by Mrs. Tilly) are presented in terms of the poverty which induces him to leave, and of his wife's perceived indolence and descent into the world of fiction. The unsentimental, down-to-earth manner in which Cassy deflates any illusions of romance or mystery in the circumstances surrounding male desertion throws into sharp relief the contrasting harsh realities of a woman's life: 'Maybe he's run away a-purpose, ... they was often doin' that on the forest, the men was' (Ch.9). In a glimpse of the more sinister aspects of domestic disharmony, physical abuse is again signalled: the man vents his 'drunken fury' on both Mrs. Tilly and Cassy (Ch.8). Despite the fact that his departure has dire economic consequences, material deprivation is deemed preferable to

male domination and aggression; moreover, Cassy's own dark experience of childhood confirms that when men are forced back to their families 'it wasn't nice for the wives and children' (Ch.9). Initially, the woman relishes the unaccustomed peace which allows her to read without interruption and take refuge in her fantasies of a better life: 'Why should she not be admired as much as the heroines she read of?' (Ch.9). Ultimately, she sees no reason why she should feel bound to struggle in her husband's absence. Leaving Cassy to manage the household (and the funeral of the grandfather), she departs in a manner 'almost romantic', such as might befit one of her fictional heroines: 'the secrecy, the assumed name ..., the uncertainty of the future, the night - all seemed to make her flight a strange and novel-like event' (Ch.10).

Attention is clearly drawn to the fictionality of literature. Such a strategy might also emphasise unresolved doubts about the veracity of other forms of story, namely those of biblical/spiritual origin, which are simultaneously affirmed and implicitly interrogated as potentially dreams or romantic tales. Once again, Stretton's work ostensibly sets out to convince the reader of the reliability and moral superiority of the religious 'story', but may function to subvert this aim, providing a contrary discourse and engaging with currents of popular thought/uncertainty. Despite Cassy's ultimate assurance of faith, much is questioned, and appears to remain unresolved in this text.

5.2 The place of a woman

In examining discourses of the maternal, the imbrication of issues of motherhood, gender and power relations becomes apparent. Constructions of motherhood, and the transmission of 'naturalised' mothering practices, as Nancy Chodorow (1978) has shown, are part of the process through which gender/labour divisions are perpetuated and sexual inequality reproduced. In her discussion of class and gender in Victorian England, Leonore Davidoff (1995) highlights the dominance of gendered categories, with gender operating as a 'fundamental organizing category at the level of both social relations and the structure of personal identity'. Gendered ideas 'became themselves instruments of control over resources, people and things, and legitimated, in principle, the drawing of boundaries between people' (7).

If matters of gender/morality sometimes function to obscure class issues, the reverse is also relevant, with ostensibly class-specific situations masking wider inequalities of

gender and power. Although Stretton's themes encompass a variety of class settings, the material or economic situation of the mother is, of course, central to many texts. However, as I have established in relation to other themes, Stretton's writing provides for the expression of issues which traverse class boundaries, and which, in certain environments, may remain unacknowledged. If domestic violence is openly regarded as inevitable - a prerogative of those in authority - in working-class communities, this does not preclude the presence of violence, or the abuse of position, in middle-class homes. Suggestions of abuse (as, for example, the bruises on a woman's body, noted in such a matter-of-fact way by the protagonist of Alone in London), may strike a chord beyond the context in which they are fictionalised.³¹ As we have seen, the process of projecting and constructing difference is brought into sharp focus in these narratives; at the same time, the articulation of women's experiences and grievances draws on, and reaches out to a collective female consciousness, with issues of gender, and the exploitation of women in general, constantly under scrutiny.

Forthright criticism of male habits or characteristics, and resentments concerning the unfair or arbitrary nature of gender relations/boundaries in society, frequently surface. The eruption of underlying anger into the text perhaps suggests the kind of 'writing in a rage' pinpointed by Virginia Woolf (1945, 70) in relation to Brontë's Jane Eyre, and is identifiable throughout Stretton's writing, whether in the full-length novels, or the shorter 'juvenile' narratives. The assertion by a character that 'all men are foolish' appears in the later Carola (Ch. 11), but the implications of women's social and domestic role (as well as their superior abilities as managers and organisers) are foregrounded from the earliest texts. Davidoff (1995, 12) observes that 'the essence of Western femininity has been defined as dependence and service, the obliteration of the self, combined with the enabling of a higher, dominant, and masculine authority'. At the same time, particularly for the poor, women's mental, physical and spiritual strength/resilience has been crucial to survival. As we have seen, both these aspects apply, in diverse permutations (and subject to varying interpretations of that 'dominant and masculine authority'), to the issues embodied in the work of Hesba Stretton.

The balancing of an attitude of complete dependence on God and the pursuit of diligence and self-help is a theme of Enoch Roden's Training (1865). However, despite the fact that a moderation, accommodation and integration of both stances is implied in

the gradual modification of characters' viewpoints, the strident statements on gender issues arguably invite wider identification and endorsement. Enjoined not to 'worry about tomorrow', wife and mother, Susan, retorts, 'But what would become of me and my family if I didn't toil and sow [later repeated as 'sew'] ... and take a deal of thought of the morrow Maybe it's only the women who have to think about it, and it seems rather hard upon us' (Ch.1). In order to pay the rent, the daughter faces the need to put practicality over sentiment in selling a treasured family possession. Recognising that her father will thank Providence for the resulting money, she asserts, 'Yes, I'm his providence' (Ch.3).³² Such comments reflect a pervasive sense that women's real worth is not acknowledged, not matched by their standing in society, or even within the family. Engaging with what Judith Walkowitz (1980, 20) describes as a 'consistent social undervaluing of daughters', Stretton highlights the perception that, across classes, 'gentlemen don't set such store on little girls as little boys'; for a father, 'a girl is only half a child'. She may be loved 'almost as if she had been a son', or considered 'not worth wasting love on'.³³ Resentment of the preferential treatment of male offspring by certain types of mother is sometimes implied: 'she was one of those mothers who thinks nothing of their girls in comparison with their sons' (In Prison and Out, Ch.3). In contrast to the special relationship applicable to some mothers and daughters, a girl may be regarded as an 'unnecessary supplement to the page of ... maternal love' (Cobwebs and Cables, Ch.7).

The current of anger directed at men and male dominance is marked in texts such as Cassy, with the viewpoint of certain characters providing a forum for the outright expression of what are, arguably, proto-feminist attitudes. The adoption by the narrator of the child's perspective serves, not to ridicule naivety, but to foreground ironically the 'naturalisation' and internalisation through experience of gender role constructions, and the consequent unquestioned acceptance of subjection. For example, the eponymous Cassy's experience of life has told her that men and boys are 'born to be the masters and tyrants of the race' (Ch.9); it is 'self-evident' and that women and girls exist 'only to submit to their jokes and fury' (Ch.8). The cultural interpretation of a patriarchal system, as opposed to the scriptural model, is ironically identified and implicitly criticised, with religion presented as potentially emancipatory:

“The King was so good to women and children!” she went on, “always makin’ it easy for them. ... There never was anybody so good to women and children! as if they were almost as good as men!” (Ch.16).³⁴

It is impossible to ignore the relationship between such textual attitudes and the declarations which characterise Stretton’s own journals. Here, as has been established, men are repeatedly described as generically unfathomable and dishonest. In considering the interplay of discourses, it is perhaps pertinent to note here both the increasingly strident tones of some strands of feminism, and, as Sally Mitchell (1977, 35) notes in relation to women’s recreational reading, the portrayal in popular/sensation fiction of woman as victim and men as villains. It would, arguably, be appropriate to accuse Stretton of demonising the male sex, were it not for her representation of men’s positive and nurturing qualities, and her complex exploration of the moral dilemmas faced by male protagonists. Forthright condemnation of the male sex in Victorian discourse is not, of course, confined to ‘popular’ texts; Stretton clearly engages with a more general gender unrest, and a recognition of women’s unequal status as highlighted not only by women, but by champions of their cause, such as John Stuart Mill.³⁵

Fear of men, and of the mystery of marriage, is a theme which surfaces throughout Stretton’s writing; the recurrence of certain patterns across the range of her work is noticeable despite ambiguities and contradictions. In the early The Clives of Burcot (1867) - a novel which engages with contemporary concerns over the taint of illegitimacy and the rights of inheritance - the protagonist finds herself both excluded and confined by men (just as many of Stretton’s child protagonists find themselves both excluded and confined by society). Marriage, although acknowledged as a solution to women’s economic situation, and a ‘lesser evil’, is feared as the unknown - a mysterious fate awaiting the woman behind closed doors, threatening both oppressive physical enclosure and the risk of psychological torture. The Bluebeard motif is specifically invoked here, as in ‘The Lucky Leg’ and other Stretton texts; Gothic imagery is frequently harnessed to emphasise the female predicament. The young protagonist of The Doctor’s Dilemma (1872), confined to her room by her husband and a colluding female tormentor - in ‘authority over [her]’ and ‘bent on making [her] submit to their will’ - is as much a prisoner as the howling dog which rattles its chain (Part 1, Ch.1); she escapes ‘like one fleeing from bitter slavery’ (Part 1, Ch.6). Marriage - destined to make you ‘either very happy or very wretched’ - may, for the mature and

like-minded, be fulfilling. By contrast, for lively young women such as Rose Morley, matrimony signals an end to happiness; the youthful bride resembles a butterfly which has flown 'heedlessly into a damp and chilly cave', able only to 'fold its wings' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.5).³⁶ At the same time, there is a sense that something is lacking in the sensible, companionate marriage, where 'no Bluebeard's Chamber' - 'no mystery' - awaits, once again suggesting the frisson engendered by that which is feared (The Doctor's Dilemma, Part 2, Ch.10).

Anxieties concerning the state of being in subjection to, or 'moulded' by, men are constantly voiced; resistance to the idea of being a slave, or in bondage 'more degrading and more cruel than slavery itself', is frequently expressed. The perception of woman's fate in such terms chimes with the common utilisation of the master-slave analogy by John Stuart Mill and others, in relation to women's position in society. The notion of women as property, or as validation of male identity, is a recurring motif: 'She bore his name, and belonged to him' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.12). Here, a man's 'unconscious egotism' in his union with an attractive woman is highlighted; he bathes in reflected glory, but his 'possession' proves less rewarding when it entails being associated with the shame of his wife's aberrant (adulterous) conduct. The idea of male ownership is already an insistent theme in The Clives of Burcot; the protagonist is passed from stepfather to husband and then to dependency on the husband's brother.³⁷ The heroine of The Doctor's Dilemma, tracked down like a hunted creature by her tyrannical husband, is subjected to vengeful and gloating declarations that 'she is my wife', 'Mine'. She finds it beyond belief that the law of a Christian country can underwrite an emotionally abusive man's claim to his wife as a 'chattel', denying her 'my right to myself' (Part 3, Ch.10). Woman's passive role as a plaything - submissively available to be admired, caressed and worshipped - is suggested in texts such as The Clives of Burcot; comparisons with 'articles of luxury' are invited. Indeed, the 'despotism' of man's nature (a characteristic also emphasised by writers such as Harriet Taylor (1850/1995) in relation to the exploitation of women's dependence) will always 'bend a woman's into some degree of conformity, or drive it into desperate revolt' (The Clives of Burcot, Ch.47).³⁸ Here, as in other narratives, there is an awareness of the susceptibility to, and illusory nature of, immature romantic love. The need - and indeed the desire - to be practically and emotionally dependent on men, and

resentment of this state of dependence, surface as contradictory currents, highlighting conventions as a site of internal struggle, and underlining the ambiguous consequences of the social operation of gender relations.³⁹ The psychological effects of an unsatisfactory father/surrogate father-child relationship, and the lack of a female role model, on the formation of female identity and on future relationships, are intimated. Juxtaposed with the clichéd situations of melodrama, which include villainy, attempted bigamy and death by shipwreck, are social/moral complexities and material/political issues which Stretton overtly raises.

The links between economic dependence and subjection are implicit in numerous texts, lying beneath the surface even when a satisfactory outcome is suggested at the level of the text. Whilst protagonists like Hester Morley have licence to be the 'arbitress of [their] own actions' (Ch.25), and to 'mark out' their own path, in many instances autonomy is constrained by poverty or financial dependence. It is clear that the eponymous Carola is only able to escape from the effects of her background and to make an independent living because of the possibility of education and comparative economic independence generated initially by her unexpected endowment. In Jessica's First Prayer, the protagonist's future depends on the continued provision of economic security by men, and such security is willingly repaid by domestic service. The relationship, in Cassy, between the young girl and the disabled Simon is devoid of the mistrust of men engendered by Cassy's experience of abuse. Simon's situation, like that of the old blind man taken in by Mrs. Clack in A Thorny Path, and like Philips's sudden lack of status in Carola, suggest an equality only possible through the symbolic castration of the male. Ironically, although the improved financial status of Cassy's protector, Simon, lifts him above poverty and in turn enables him to 'buy' Cassy from her father, it seems that she is freed from abuse and exploitation only to become a willing domestic servant to Simon in return for economic security. There is simultaneously a foregrounding of the exploitation involved in the practice of employing young working-class girls as servants, and an apparent acceptance of the female as servant of the male, when this service is accompanied by the pleasure of grateful sacrifice.

Such notions again appear to underwrite normative assumptions about the domestic role as the ultimate (and desirable) destiny of women. Conflicting currents, however,

compete for primacy in Stretton's texts, as in aspects of her life. Domesticity may, indeed, constitute a desirable preparation for motherhood, but the exploitation of women within the domestic sphere is repeatedly suggested in the representation of female attitudes, for example in texts such as Lost Gip, and A Thorny Path. Here unequal power relations, divisions of labour, and the delineation of male and female space are signalled. Leonore Davidoff (1995, 6) discusses the division of space within buildings as a social marker, part of a 'complicated tapestry of gendered meanings'. She cites the maintenance of such divisions lower down the social scale, albeit 'reduced to the husband and father's special chair by the fireplace' (6). In Stretton's narratives, the centrality of the adult male in the hierarchy of the household is brought under scrutiny. The assumption of the central space occupied by the male body, and the implied limitation of physical space permitted to the female body, is signified in narratorial references to the husband's posture:

Even in her own house she seemed to make herself as small as possible, and to take up as little room as she could. To have a man there, who spoke in a loud and deep voice, and who stretched his legs right across her narrow hearth, blocking up the way to the fire, was the heaviest trial that could have befallen her.' (A Thorny Path, Ch.6);

[his] thin long legs were stretched quite across the hearth, as though no one else needed to sit by the fire (Lost Gip, Ch.8).⁴⁰

In the latter text, the man is portrayed as indolent and demanding, scathing (and jealous) of his wife's philanthropic efforts. There is, however, an intimation that gender divisions are not immutable; Stretton shows an awareness of the misunderstandings between men and women, and the possibility of conventional patterns being overturned. Rather than reinforcing naturalised assumptions about women's role, religious conviction is shown, through the events of Lost Gip, to be effective in addressing aspects of inequality and exploitation within domestic relations. It can again be seen as progressive rather than conservative, liberating rather than restrictive or regulatory. This illustrates the view held by many female reformers, who, as Frank Prochaska (1980, 12) notes, hailed Christianity 'an emancipating influence', a force for equality.⁴¹ In Stretton's Lost Gip, Mr. Shafto's 'awakened conscience' (Ch.11) promotes a reshaping of attitudes and gender relations; recognition of his own idleness, and an increased compassion for his fellow human beings, extends to the inequalities of the

marital relationship. He relinquishes his right to the lion's share of the food - an assumed right, symbolic of status as much as a recognition of nutritional needs - and is suddenly concerned that his wife should not soil her hands with cleaning his boots:

Mrs. Shafto could not trust her own ears. She had cleaned her husband's boots for him every day ever since they were married, even when her work was very pressing (Ch.11).

The reader is clearly invited to endorse the unfairness of such a situation. Here, it would seem that Stretton's personal aversion to the trials of domesticity adds fuel to her arguments of injustice, which appear to echo her diary comments on domestic slavery.⁴² Again, she has used the child character, Sandy, not only as an instrument of spiritual/moral awakening, but as a vehicle for the exposure of social and gender-related grievances, just as writers for children such as E. Nesbit were later to do.

The idea of an impermeable barrier between men and women - with men as alien and impenetrably 'other' - is accentuated in A Thorny Path, but possible factors which contribute to such a gulf are considered. Old Mrs. Clack (who is actually unmarried although she adopts the title Mrs.) protests that she 'can't abide to have aught to do with men', who 'cost so much' and are 'so wasteful and masterful' (Ch.2). The narrator, adopting Mrs. Clack's perspective, presents men as 'coarse' and 'domineering'. Mrs. Clack is shown to be embarrassed by the presence of a man, albeit one who is old and blind, in her house.⁴³ She perceives him to be 'as strange, and almost as dreaded a creature to her, as if Don had brought one of the savage wild beasts from the Zoological Gardens to find shelter in her quiet little home' (Ch.6). We are not, however, left with the impression of such perceptions as necessarily definitive. It becomes clear that Mrs. Clack was raised and trained in an orphanage, where girls were brought up in strict seclusion, and that she later worked chiefly among women: 'Thus her whole experience of life had been strictly confined to the woman's side of it' (Ch.6). Society/authority must take its share of the blame for accentuating divisions between men and women through its practice of social segregation. The ageing Simister, in Bede's Charity, finds himself similarly uncomfortable with women, judging their habits and their fashions unaccountably alien and unsettling.⁴⁴ Analysing his life-long lack of association with women ('there hasn't been a woman up my stairs these twenty years'), he explains:

“A woman’s like a watch, and needs a man to carry her, and wind her up, and regulate her speed, and see to her main-spring. I’ve had so much to do with watches that I didn’t want anything to do with women” (Ch.9).

There are instances, across classes, of men who perceive women as creatures to be kept in their place and out of mischief (Cassy; Half Brothers).⁴⁵ However, Stretton sometimes points up such attitudes, and the differences between men and women, in order not merely to critique them, but to explore them and break them down. She suggests that it is possible to overcome misunderstandings, that both sexes ‘have human hearts’ (A Thorny Path, Ch.7) and potentially share a common consciousness.

In Under the Old Roof, the reversal of traditional divisions of labour is specifically pointed out. Responsibility for the care of the child is assumed by the father - more advanced in years - while the mother works full-time as wage-earner (which the neighbours term ‘slaving like a man’) in order to support the family and to buy back the cottages once owned by her own father. As househusband, the man has practised ‘the careful thrift and constant self-denial, ordinarily the woman’s part’ (Ch.2); Abigail has ‘never been so dependent upon her husband as most women are’ (Ch.4). In a text which is partly concerned with an over-reliance on possessions, with the healing of family rifts and with spiritual reconciliation, other agendas and subtexts compete. Naturalised attitudes with regard to gender roles are voiced (but implicitly questioned): resentment of the assumption of the leading role by a woman, and of her position as property owner, is expressed by her stepson, who vows he would ‘never set foot again in a house where a woman was the master’ (Ch.2).

Here, as in a number of Stretton’s texts, the narrative provides a framework for acknowledged polemic. In a prefatory note, we are informed that the story was intended to illustrate the great injustice suffered by women prior to the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts and to highlight the benefits of present equalities. Published in 1882, and coinciding with the passing of the 1882 Amendment (which followed more than twenty years of campaigning, the passing of legislation, and agitation for further reform), Under the Old Roof raises issues which reflect and highlight the inequalities of women’s position under the law. It reiterates the persistent theme of men’s economic, social and legal oppression of women, despite women’s economic contribution. In an era which saw the evolution of diffuse and conflicting currents of feminism, the text

engages with the strand of feminist thought which had, since the mid-century, sought to promote women's rights within marriage. The campaigns for reform of the married women's property law, supported and greatly influenced by prominent figures such as John Stuart Mill and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, were the subject of debate in the press and journals, and provoked opposition on the grounds that they threatened the sacramental nature of marriage (Holcombe, 1980).

Stretton specifically bases the narrative on the unjust consequences of aspects of earlier property law; her intention is clearly to raise awareness and to interrogate common and persisting assumptions regarding the issue of women's rights. Her indignation surfaces in the narration, and through the mouths of her characters. In a chapter entitled 'Is it Just?' she sets out the prior position in law through the words of Abigail's stepson: 'a married woman's goods go to her husband, whether it's houses, or lands, or money, if there's not any settlin' of 'em on herself afore she's married' (Ch.4). As Lee Holcombe (1980, 4) confirms, in a discussion of Victorian wives and property, married women had no identity apart from their husbands, a situation clearly reflected in Stretton's dialogue: 'I know the law and by the law a married woman is nobody' (Under the Old Roof, Ch.4). Once again, it is possible to recognise the author's recurring preoccupation with those to whom society denies an identity.

Hesba Stretton's diaries reveal her regular reading of magazines and journals. It is inviting to speculate on the likelihood of her following, amongst other prominent discussions, the debates regarding the denial of women's rights within marriage as charted by Annie Besant, also in 1882. Besant (1882/Jeffreys (ed.), 1987, 394) discusses the subjection of women over history, citing an article in the Westminster Review of April 1876 which draws on Aristotle's recognition of the similarities between the conditions of women and slaves - a comparison which again chimes with Stretton's view of relations between the sexes.⁴⁶ Also quoted by Besant are excerpts from parliamentary proceedings (14.4.1869) relating to the Married Women's Property Bill and highlighting the denial to a wife of 'that which one might suppose to be her inalienable right, the fruit of her mental or bodily toil' (Besant, 406), a situation reflected in Under the Old Roof.

5.3 Mothers, sisters, mentors and 'old maids'

If the expression of attitudes towards men in Stretton's work - at times oppositional, at times conciliatory or unconventional - results in overall tensions in her writing, there is a certain ambiguity in her representation of women. Whilst M. Nancy Cutt's suggestion (1979, 120) of Hesba Stretton as the alter ego of Sarah Smith has some validity, the division is, arguably, far from clear-cut. The fluidity with which these possible identities fuse and diverge, generating conflicting or ambivalent representations, allows Stretton to play with the distinctions between public and private role in a way which frustrates the allocation of particular characteristics or attitudes. Although, as noted, there are indications in her diaries of her impatience with women in general, there is also evidence of a female 'coterie', with the bonds of sisterhood presented in a positive light. Stretton both criticises and endorses female networks, making fun of them in ways which complicate interpretation. She describes in her diary an exclusively female picnic which 'reminded us of Martin's "Plains of Heaven", where there are no men.' (Log Book: 17.7.1863).⁴⁷ She also exploits the existence of women's gatherings for her own ends. Although the regular 'Dorcas' meetings figure in her journals as unbearably dreary occasions, Stretton could not fail to recognise their place as a forum for women's exchange of gossip (an occupation, as we have seen, not totally eschewed by her), and she was quick to use the setting as the starting point for her story 'The Lucky Leg'.

M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 120) suggests that Stretton as author/narrator 'likes' women in her texts. We have seen, however, that, despite a concern for women's suffering and an indignation at particular aspects of women's social and material position, Stretton's female characters are not consistently the embodiment of goodness, suggesting a resistance to gender stereotyping; Stretton is, moreover, not averse to satirising certain kinds of women. The self-aware, independent and public-spirited woman who can provide, and enjoy, equality and companionship in marriage - with, at the same time, a degree of romance - emerges, perhaps, as Stretton's ideal; she regularly figures in the middle-class settings of longer novels. Nonetheless, if frail, insipid or frivolous women, such as those decried by Charlotte Yonge and others, are subject to criticism - as well as sympathy - both in Stretton's diaries and in her narratives, so are possessive and overbearing females. Some ambivalence towards strong women is apparent; in Under the Old Roof, despite Stretton's clear support for the capable protagonist, there are

suggestions that a woman can be too masterful. Numerous possessive and domineering female characters appear in Stretton's work, as noted in relation to the 'mother-influence' exercised by Mrs. Henry Wood upon her son (Chapter 1.7 of this study). Women may also act as agents of patriarchy - complicit in, and sometimes exceeding the tyrannies of, male oppression of female protagonists, as in The Doctor's Dilemma. Marina Warner (1996, 282/3) discusses the figure of the wicked stepmother - so common in fairy tales - and the different guises in which she appears. She speaks of the antagonism shown towards stepchildren by stepmothers, and the feelings of rivalry exhibited by women towards daughters-in-law - patterns which characterise stories and fairy tales across the world, reflecting cultural mythologies and lived experience. In Hester Stretton's work, such archetypal figures frequently surface, appearing, as we have seen, in the role of the scheming stepmother - the 'ruin' of a stepdaughter's life, as in The Doctor's Dilemma and The Soul of Honour - or in the guise of the jealous mother-in-law, protective of her 'adored' son and resentful of the younger woman's usurpation of her position. In Carola, Mrs. Arnold's preoccupation with, and over-involvement in, her son's future and his choice of wife are presented as undesirable traits, and the interfering presence of Mrs. Ashworth in The Clives of Burcot is, at times, felt as overbearing, stifling and malign. As the narrator of The Highway of Sorrow (1894) acknowledges, a son is likely to be torn between the influence of his mother and that of his wife; even an accepting mother may experience an instinctive jealousy of the girl who is 'destined to steal away her son from her' (Ch.4). In Cobwebs and Cables (1881), a mother's fear of losing her son is linked to fears of displacement - to her longstanding conviction that he has never encountered a woman 'more beautiful and fascinating than the mother he had always admired with so much enthusiasm' (Ch.28).

If, as Marina Warner (1996, 283) discusses, the feared or fearful woman sometimes appears as a spinster, we can recognise this figure in portraits such as Stretton's Miss Waldron - the jealous and controlling daughter and sister in Hester Morley's Promise. Resembling a 'domestic pope - infallible and autocratic' (Ch.17), Miss Waldron is a frustrated theologian, the pulpit her natural 'sphere'. 'Born a woman', she has 'missed her avocation' (Ch.27). The satirisation of such figures perhaps also betrays a fear of a prolonged state of singleness - of being doomed to the 'empty, vacant lot of an

unmarried woman' (The Doctor's Dilemma (1872, Part 2, Ch.20) - at the same time as it signals a resentment of the cultural restraints which limit women's involvement in the public sphere. Stretton's journals, as noted, contain numerous disparaging comments about 'old maids', indicating a half-humorous acknowledgement, and perhaps an underlying discomfort regarding her progress towards this state - one which, albeit common, was denigrated or vilified by society and feared by many women. The fictional Miss Waldron, racked with envy and insecurity, and 'shiver[ing] at the thought of being old' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.44), schemes desperately, and without success, to secure a match for herself.

J.S. Bratton (1981, 185-6) recognises Mrs. Ashworth (The Clives of Burcot) as a figure constructed in opposition to the heroine, Rhoda. However, Stretton's representation of the older woman is, in fact, more complex than this; Mrs. Ashworth can be seen to embody many of the conflicting perceptions of, and attitudes towards women. Reflecting the ambiguities surrounding the figure of the mother, she symbolises both positive and negative conceptions, self and other. The woman is at the same time presumed surrogate mother and unacknowledged natural mother; archetypal evil witch-mother - or stepmother/mother-in-law (as recreated in melodrama), and strong female mentor/champion of social reform. Sacrificial defender of her son's interests and honour, she is also the possessive manipulator of his life and the lives of others with whom he is associated. The woman/mother as victim and the woman/mother as malign influence are confused in a manner which reflects the conflicting social and psychological implications of the role.⁴⁸

Mrs. Ashworth is described in markedly masculine terms (just as the protagonist's first husband is feminised), indicating an unsettling of gender characteristics. However, the woman's height and strength are shown to oppress, suggesting her function as patriarchal agent. She is strong-minded, inviting identification with the biblical figure of Jael, as a woman taking 'her own cause into her own hands' (Ch. 20). Throughout the text, she is alternately feared, pitied and admired by the central protagonist, Rhoda, who 'submit[s] to Mrs. Ashworth's authority', despite her own superior social standing. At the same time, Rhoda hungers for the education in matters of social/political reform which the older woman sets out to impart, and which Rhoda appears unable to emulate without a male guide. The woman is, however, far from the longed-for substitute

mother/female confidante. In the frustratingly elusive character of this protagonist, as in other portrayals, Stretton draws from the polarised representations of popular fiction, but goes on to unsettle expectations and draw attention to misperceptions.

Whilst such ambivalence might suggest inconsistent characterisation, the problematising of definitive portrayals serves to render these narratives complex and interrogative. The attitudes and arguments conveyed in Stretton's writing, and the shifting positions which she adopts, both as woman and writer, rehearse the debates and conflicts pervading public/private discourse, simultaneously embodying and challenging mythologies. Binary oppositions are set up and then complicated; the consistency of behaviour or morality inherent in simplistic images is questioned, disrupting notions of a stable and coherent identity.

5.4 The maternal and the unconscious

In examining the complexities of womanhood and female identity, it is illuminating to direct a more intense focus onto aspects of the maternal relation which underpin many of the issues discussed. In so doing, whilst recognising the complex and ambiguous nature of such links, I wish to elaborate on points of connection between Stretton's life/psyche, emotional and material deprivation in society, archetypal fears or longings, and motifs and patterns in the texts. The motif of loss/separation dominates Stretton's narratives, from the earliest stories and novels such as The Clives of Burcot, through texts such as Lost Gip and The Storm of Life, to the later The Lord's Pursebearers and others. Both the terror of being lost and fear of the loss of a child tap into archetypal fears of separation or abandonment, going back to early myths such as that of Oedipus, and resurfacing in many guises in the form of oral stories and fairy tales. Such fears are bound up with the ambivalence of the mother-child relationship, as well as being related to unfulfilled maternal yearnings.⁴⁹ We have seen the pivotal importance - both practical and psychological - of the mother to the child, the pain of maternal deprivation, encapsulated in Cassy's cry of desolation, 'Oh! if mother hadn't died!' (Ch.1). From the perspective of the mother, the intense suffering experienced on separation - even though, as we have seen, mothers in Stretton's texts sometimes initiate this parting - is a recurring and palpable feature. These experiences of attachment and separation invite

further exploration at a psychic level, offering the possibility of engagement with desires, fears and pre-symbolic currents within the unconscious of writer and reader.

Stretton, as we have seen, shared the devastating loss of the maternal figure experienced by so many of her characters. Like her protagonist, Hester Morley, she could begin to identify with the 'loneliness', 'desertion' and 'dumb sufferings of childhood' which are the lot of the 'forlorn' and 'desolate' child abandoned by its mother (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.54). As a single woman with decidedly ambivalent feelings towards men and marriage, Stretton welcomed the arrival, and rejoiced in the company of her young nieces and nephews; she clearly cared deeply about the welfare of children in general. How much did she yearn for children of her own? And, importantly, to what extent might such yearning be associated with a desire for reunion with the maternal, exacerbated by loss? At the level of acknowledged thought, we can only speculate, but it is also relevant to consider hidden drives or desires, both individual and collective. Moreover, Stretton's journals suggest currents of yearning - perhaps partially unconscious - for a child.⁵⁰ Despite an awareness of the disadvantages of maternity, and the benefits of an unencumbered state, the idea of a woman's completeness being attained ultimately through motherhood is, as we have seen, persistent in Stretton's writing, through the voice of narrator and characters. In 'The Lucky Leg', the idea is proposed that 'if any human influence would make me great or good as a woman, it would be the guardianship of a child of my own'; another protagonist asserts that her children's dependence makes her precious to herself (375). It is plausible that Stretton's preoccupation with motherhood and with the plight of children might stem from such a perception, whether consciously or unconsciously held.

It is fruitful at this point to draw upon sociological and psychoanalytical theories regarding the mother-child relationship and the nature of the pre-Oedipal bond. Nancy Chodorow (1978, 109/10) discusses the sense of oneness and continuity between mother and infant.⁵¹ She also (211) states that the capacities and needs which create women as mothers also create potential contradictions in mothering. 'A mother's sense of continuity with her infant may shade into too much connection and not enough separateness'. In addition, women's need to turn to children to recreate a mother-child unity, means that 'mothering is invested with a mother's often conflictual, ambivalent, yet powerful need for her own mother' (212). Women seek to return to the symbiotic

relationship with their mothers through their oneness with a child. They may also turn to children to fulfil emotional desires unmet by men or other women. Sons may become substitutes for husbands, and daughters substitutes for mothers (212).

We have seen that, at various levels, Stretton's work embodies and complicates the contradictory responses, of idealisation and loathing, towards the mother. The early The Clives of Burcot, as noted, incorporates multiple representations of womanhood and mothering. Here, diverse possibilities are enacted, with both the all-consuming nature and the ambivalence characteristic of the mother-child relationship exemplified. Interplay is demonstrated between two mother-child dyads: that of Bruin and his surrogate/actual mother, and that constituted by the relationship of the protagonist Rhoda and her own child, both of which are characterised by intensity and possessiveness. The degree to which Rhoda directs her emotional and physical energies towards her child signals a total immersion in the mother-child relationship which effaces boundaries and enacts the fusing of the two identities in a pre-Oedipal bond.

The novel examines complex relational configurations. It is concerned with a yearning for/readjustment of the maternal relation. The protagonist, Rhoda, has never known her own mother, and perhaps can be seen as subconsciously reconstructing the missing mother-child relationship, whereby she seeks to be remothered and absorbed in the relationship of oneness with, and dependence on, her own child.⁵² The desire to merge with the child and perhaps thereby to re-merge with the mother is signalled. The movements of a carriage are compared with the rocking of a cradle, suggesting the need for maternal contact and affection. There are intimations of the pull of pre-symbolic yearnings in Rhoda's desire for a reunion with nature, and in the fluidity of language contained in descriptions of water. Here, we might invoke feminist theories of the semiotic, involving unconscious pre-Oedipal drives and rhythms associated with the womb, and suggest the influence of undercurrents of yearning for renewed connection in the psyche of author and, potentially, reader.⁵³

If it is true that 'nobody can love a child like its own mother does' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.63), a love which is exclusive may, nonetheless, have negative implications. The question of overt jealousy on the part of the father surfaces at a practical level in texts such as The Storm of Life, where the mother's life, with good

reason, is 'bound up' in her child (Ch.10). As Stretton indicates in texts such as Cobwebs and Cables, there are women who love more as mothers than as wives. In The Clives of Burcot, the intensity of the bond between Rhoda and her daughter excludes the possibility of other relationships; it precludes wholehearted attachment to her protector and suitor, Bruin, perhaps signifying the displacement of physical passion into an intensification of the mother-child relationship. In her response to Bruin, we can identify elements of the daughter-father relation, similar to those recognisable in the Rochester/Jane Eyre connection. Bruin frequently addresses Rhoda through her child, reinforcing the impression of the dissolution of the identity of one into the other in symbiotic fusion.⁵⁴

Interestingly, Mrs. Ashworth (who, because of the stigma of illegitimacy, remains unacknowledged as Bruin's mother) alternately supports and works to obstruct the relationship between Rhoda and her son. In a complex outworking of Oedipal conflict, involving the interplay of multiple parent-child relations, the older woman ultimately acts to disrupt the second dyad in order physically to effect the separation of mother and child. She engineers the apparent death of the child in an attempt to break the ties and release Rhoda's emotional and erotic energies towards Bruin. The child's enforced disappearance prompts anxiety that she has strayed into territory beyond the protective gate, into the dangers of the woods, suggesting the fear on the part of the mother, not only of the child's safety, but of separation and individuation. There is also the suggestion of a desire for reabsorption, in the child's (apparent) reclamation by the waters of the river. The sense of loss, pain and desolation are overwhelming for Rhoda, who has to work through this separation. The process, together with the return of the child and the death of the older woman, lead to the eventual resumption of a reconstituted - and by implication, more balanced - relationship with Bruin. It is, at the same time, possible to see the pre-Oedipal bond as representing a threat to the symbolic order, in its exclusion of the father figure. The sense of oneness with the child provides the dominant impression, and arguably offers engagement - individual and collective - at a primal level.

Such mother-child fusion is reinforced in the account of birth contained in Half Brothers (Ch.15). The mother feels her identity flowing out into her child - 'her own personality was gone; it had entered into her child', again inviting both positive and negative

readings of the maternal function. The description of merging identity dissolves into thoughts of parental - and memories of maternal - loss, and leads into a fluid expression of the fusion experienced in religious conversion. This serves, of course, to accentuate the parental and in-dwelling nature of God; it also foregrounds the wider association of the maternal with the spiritual. Furthermore, when the adult protagonist of David Lloyd's Last Will (1869) falls asleep as part of an experiment in spiritual/mystical meditation in Edenic surroundings, she is awakened from a 'dream of her lost mother' (Vol.1, Ch.10), underlining the deep-seated and pivotal nature of such primal longings, and their existence in a realm partially beyond signification.⁵⁵ The need both to be mothered and to mother surfaces in other Stretton texts; it emerges as a central motif in Hester Morley's Promise, where Hester's relationship with her own mother, curtailed by maternal death, is replaced by a new bond between child and stepmother, based on mutual need and lack. In this instance, the traditional paradigm of the hateful - and hated - stepmother, set up through the invocation of Hester's early fears and potentially divided loyalties, and echoed in the motif of the stepchild as potential 'drudge', is, in fact, subverted. Hester, significantly, is both child and mother, just as Rose is both mother and child. In a complex continuation and reversal/reconfiguration of the maternal relation, Hester faithfully maintains the role of loving stepdaughter and assumes that of soothing mother figure to the childlike second wife - despite having been yet again deserted by the latter. She effectively 'rescues' the older woman, and, in turn, reaches out, as substitute mother, and as part of a continuous cycle, to the abandoned child of the stepmother's illicit union.

5.5 Metaphors of 'mothering': social and literary mothers

These texts evidence the complex power of the maternal, both from a psychoanalytic and a material perspective; such currents are, perhaps, key to responses to Stretton's work. It is also useful to expand the discussion to embrace a wider social (but psychologically related) sphere, and to focus on an extended category of mothering - that of 'social' motherhood. If, as the narrator of Stretton's The Soul of Honour (Ch.8), acknowledges, girls should not be misled into thinking of 'marriage with a good settlement' as the ultimate goal of female development, there might nevertheless remain the need, on the part of successful single women, for maternal energies to be diverted, redirected into alternative practical forms. There are several, overlapping, areas in

which the notion of Stretton as 'mother' operates, and in which the practical, psychological and the metaphorical converge. We have noted the mounting pressure, during the nineteenth century, for various kinds of social reform, and the prominence of philanthropy at individual, group and, increasingly, state level - the latter, in fact, often perceived as 'mothering' by the state. Frank Prochaska (1980) has drawn attention to the harnessing by women of the possibilities offered by philanthropic activity.

Women's perceived 'natural' qualities of compassion and sensitivity, in combination with their domestic experience and what Frances Power Cobbe (1863) termed their 'sense of the law of love ... comprehension of the wants of childhood' were seen to equip them to be ideal 'agents of social improvement' (Prochaska, 7/8). Missionary endeavour was the inevitable outpouring of maternal love. No Christian denomination placed greater stress on charitable conduct than the evangelicals, with women prominent in the work of church/chapel.

Accounts of women's work among women underline their involvement in substitute maternity; the recognition of servant girls' need of 'mothering', as expressed by the philanthropist Mrs. Nassau Senior, is highlighted by Miss Sellers, in 'Women's Work for the Welfare of Girls' (1893, 36).⁵⁶ Similarly, in Stretton's The King's Servants, the 'poor, miserable, lost girls' rescued from the streets are in want of someone to call 'mother' (Part 3, Ch.8). As we have noted, Stretton clearly felt that involvement in such substitute mothering was a natural and inevitable course for women.⁵⁷ Importantly, engagement in philanthropic work offered opportunities for independent women to transcend the limits of conventional female roles, to partake in what was in some respects seen as an adventure into a world conceived of as 'other'.⁵⁸ It provided a medium for self-expression, a means of extending influence beyond the home, an arena for political activity, participation in the transformation and regeneration or 'rebirth' of society.

Clearly, Stretton's involvement with philanthropy and reform, as well as providing an intellectual forum for her social and political ideas, brings her into this category of 'social' motherhood, part of women's alternative maternal mission. The causes which are at the heart of much of Stretton's practical and literary activity revolve around the social 'mothering' of children and young people - whether this maternal endeavour concerns the protection of the waif, the rehabilitation of the delinquent youth or the

rescue/care of the exploited young woman. Such preoccupations, in themselves representing substitute progeny which demand, and provide a focus for, committed emotional and physical attention/energy, at the same time afford opportunities to 'mother', both literally and in a wider sense.⁵⁹

If, as Mitzi Myers (1999, 69) suggests, 'the act of writing' may function as 'an act of mothering', this idea is applicable in various respects to Stretton's project. As 'creator' of her narratives - which are often, as we have noted, personified - Stretton is able to give birth to substitute offspring, without male intervention. The fruits of her (pro)creation, at the same time, provide the medium - a site of nurturance - through which other kinds of mothering are enacted, and within which patriarchal systems are interrogated, alternative parental and familial processes generated. Significantly, through the voice of Felicita of Cobwebs and Cables, Stretton also expresses the idea of a writer's thoughts being like children to her; she underlines - just as she underlines the undesirability of such a fate for the 'real' (actual and fictional) children of her project - the importance of not sending them out into the world 'ragged and uncouth' (Ch.19). In so doing, she establishes textual ideas as both subject to, and agents of, diverse forms of nurture, socialisation and cultural mediation.

¹ Such images of shared exclusion are evoked in the paintings of Frederick Walker and Richard Redgrave, and the engravings of Luke Fildes and Gustave Doré. The pitiful mother who abandons her baby features in the work of the artist Frank Holl. Literary representations of the outcast mother and child can be found in texts such as Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) and George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), works which engage with a range of perspectives on the complexities of motherhood. For examples of the correspondence between the descriptions/illustrations of the rejected or displaced mother and child in Stretton's narratives and contemporary artistic representations, see Appendix IIh, Ili, IIj and IIk to this study.

² Three of the spheres, Kaplan explains, correspond approximately to the 'three main kinds of discursive mothers', namely, the mother 'in her socially constructed, institutional role'; the mother 'in the unconscious ... through whom the subject is constituted'; and the mother 'in fictional representations who combines the institutionally positioned mother and the unconscious mother'. The fourth mother - 'the "real life" ... (bodily mother)', or 'historical figure who interacts daily with her child', is, for Kaplan, 'ultimately not-representable as such', but, nevertheless, of great importance because of the way in which discourses construct the 'lived reality' of motherhood (Kaplan, 1992, 6/7).

³ Kaplan (1992) discusses, over the course of her study, several different maternal paradigms, including the internalised maternal sacrifice model and the evil, monstrous or witch-mother type, both of which are seen as complying with the dominant patriarchal mother-discourse and are examined under the category of 'complicit' melodrama. According to Kaplan, 'resisting' patriarchal texts, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), more overtly interrogate/contest dominant structures, sometimes blending transgressive currents and unconscious, mythic elements, and problematising traditional dualities. See also Kaplan's discussion of the conscious political/material emphasis of certain melodramatic texts (for example, Kaplan, 126; 129).

⁴ Sara Holdsworth (1992, 7) discusses the complex history and significance of the Virgin and Child image. Representing a repository of cultural/social attitudes towards women, its defining emphasis is tenderness and submissiveness. As Anne Higonnet (1998, 42) confirms in relation to the perception of motherhood as a 'holy calling', 'if the Holy Mother was "mother", then all mothers must be holy'. Stretton's contemporary, Henrietta Synnot, observes that, from the perspective of the young child, the mother may represent almost a 'Divine Being' (1875, 496-7). Paintings such as those by C.W. Cope ('Mother and Child' (1852) and 'The Young Mother' (1846) reproduced in Nead, 1988, Plates 4 and 5) underline the closeness and completeness of the ideal maternal relation. The association of the maternal with the sacred also functions to sublimate the sensuality inherent in this relation (Higonnet, 1998, 43).

⁵ Stretton suggests that these characteristic mothering qualities were threatened by the 'increasing roughness and coarseness of manner' engendered by this love of liberty (*The Times*, 8.1.1884). Edward Salmon's interest in producing suitable mothers again reflects the emphasis on eugenic concerns, and the drive towards the moral and physical improvement of race and nation.

⁶ The tendency to construct images in terms of binary oppositions characterises discourses of the mother - in psychoanalytical terms, the ideal, nurturing figure versus the evil or denying mother. The focus on archetypal oppositions is increasingly evident in various forms during the Victorian era; it continues to permeate and influence cultural meanings/practices throughout the period, often reflecting/reproducing social unease and concern for moral/social reform.

⁷ The image of the Virgin and Child functioned as a point of reference for artists such as William Mulready who, in *The Lesson* (1859), combined religious resonances with suggestions of the value of maternal influence on the moral and spiritual welfare of the child (Holdsworth, 1992, 7; see Appendix IIm to this study). The pervasive idea that 'the character of a child is formed ... in great measure by the influence of the home, and above all, by the mother' is voiced by Stretton's contemporary, Mrs. Sumner, in 'The Responsibilities of Mothers' (1893, 67). Charlotte Yonge (1876, 264) viewed homemaking as perhaps 'the most important of all the duties of womankind'. This idea is evoked in many of Stretton's stories in relation to formative influence of mothers; the importance of the mother is particularly emphasised in relation to delinquency, as Chapter 6.6 of this study further demonstrates.

⁸ We have noted in Chapter 4 of this study the perceived effects of a lack of maternal guidance on protagonists such as Stretton's Carola. In *An Acrobat's Girlhood* (1889), there is 'no loss like that loss to girls like us' (Ch.1). Mrs. Gaskell, in *Mary Barton*, also underlines the 'pitiful loss' which the motherless girl experiences in terms of an absence of direction concerning right and wrong, particularly in relation to dealings with the opposite sex (1848/1987, 383). Henrietta Synnot (1875, 497) likewise comments on the role of a mother in answering a young girl's questions. In a discussion of the wider significance of maternal absence or disembodiment in Victorian literature, Carolyn Dever (1998, 22) suggests such 'normative' absence as 'a sign that something is different - and perhaps amiss - within the individual, the

home, and the world'. As a theme, appropriated for diverse structural, cultural and ideological purposes, it can be recognised as assuming heightened importance during the nineteenth-century, with the trope of maternal absence, as Dever confirms, serving at one level as a powerful tool in the preservation of the maternal ideal (6).

⁹ The 'humanising' qualities of female mentoring are often foregrounded by Stretton, as in *Half Brothers* (Ch.51). In *An Acrobat's Girlhood*, the lack of a wife's restraining influence means that the man spends his wages on drink and takes insufficient interest in his children to ensure their protection from danger and exploitation. In Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, the death of Mary's mother marks the departure of one of the 'good influences' over John Barton's life, and the loosening of the ties which 'bound him down to the gentle humanities of earth' (1848/1987, 22). Harriet Taylor (1850/Pyle (ed.), 1995, 31), writing on the need for women's enfranchisement, acknowledges women's 'softening influence' upon men, which renders them 'less harsh and brutal.'

¹⁰ In this process, class and gender are elided and confused. As noted in relation to issues of sexuality, historians such as Leonore Davidoff (1995) and Judith Walkowitz (1992) have discussed perceptions of the woman of the 'residuum' as part of the 'lower regions' of society, associated with filth and effluvia. As Davidoff (1995, 6) comments, 'Like the prototypical "other", woman might not only be the tender heart to man's cool directing head, but sometimes was relegated, along with other social outcasts such as paupers and gypsies, to unsavoury nether regions below the waist'. In Chapter 6 of this study, the harnessing of such metaphors in the construction of various categories of otherness is further examined.

11

Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her (Dickens, 1854/1994, 65).

... he could distinguish pretty plainly the figure of a person, which looked more like a heap of rags crouching upon his door-sill. A tattered coat was tied round the neck by the sleeves, and an old brimless hat was drawn over the back of the head; but the tangled hair, which hung in ragged locks over the face, was too long for a man's; and as he stooped down to look more closely, it was certainly a woman's face which was turned towards him. ... he could not open the door until the miserable creature had moved, and, though she raised herself a little, she did not get up on her feet' (*Jessica's Mother*, Ch.3).

There could be no mistake that the tattered and wretched woman, who was half lying and half sitting on the rank grass, with her head resting against the wall ... was his mother (*Lost Gip*, Ch.18).

¹² Such representations were clearly commonplace decades before, but undoubtedly fed into, later melodramatised portrayals of the slum woman, such as W.T. Stead's 1885 'The Maiden Tribute'. Judith Walkowitz (1992, 119/120, discussing the role of images contained in Stead's account (and the earlier publication by Mearns, entitled 'The Bitter Cry of Outcast London', 1883), comments on the representation of the unrespectable poor in the figure of the dissolute, drunken slum mother. Despite concern for the cause of the mother, a recognition of her 'power' as guardian of moral and physical welfare provoked some middle-class observers to 'blame "bad mothers" for the degenerate conditions of the slums and the physical degeneracy of slum-dwellers, while ignoring the actual constraints on women who appeared powerful but who suffered from male domination and the inequities of class' (Walkowitz, 120).

¹³ An illustration to *Jessica's Mother* (by Victor Prout) shows the mother in a similar pose. Although Jessica's mother is not holding a baby, her posture/attire is reminiscent of that of the woman sitting on a doorstep shown in the photograph entitled 'The Crawlers' by John Thompson (from '*Street Life in London*', 1877, included in Stedman Jones, 1984). See Appendix II n and II p to this study. The slumped/crouched position signals debasement, subordination, despair and degradation. Dickens, in his Christmas story 'The Haunted Man', describes a forlorn, haggard, unwomanly prostitute, sitting, head bent, on the stairs (1848/1995, 322).

¹⁴ The inebriate and negligent mother had, of course, already featured in William Hogarth's engraving entitled *Gin Lane* (1751).

¹⁵ The motif of the bridge suicide appeared in Thomas Hood's much published poem 'The Bridge of Sighs' (1844), and in illustrations such as those by Gustave Doré (1878), reproduced in Nead, 1988. For examples of representations, see Appendix IIq, IIr and IIs to this study.

¹⁶ Many of Stretton's female characters are shown to be assertive and resilient in coping with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Like Rachel in *The Storm of Life*, they may be strong-willed, preventing husbands from exercising 'tyranny' to effect. Such representations raise questions about the desirability of passive femininity.

¹⁷ Despite the obvious emphasis on the contrast between the fate of saved and unsaved souls, it is perhaps of symbolic significance that, in pursuing her, the man (not fundamentally responsible for her downfall, but perhaps implicated by virtue of his initial condemnation of her) also suffers a literal 'fall'. My study deals particularly with representations of the fallen female, but a number of Stretton's long novels address the financial and moral fall of male characters, who are shown to be not always far removed from 'common thieves'. In *Hester Morley's Promise*, the reckless young protagonist who entices Rose into adultery is shown to be as culpable as the 'fallen woman', an emphasis which engages with contemporary debates concerning the 'double-standard', and challenges notions that moral sin is worse in a woman than in a man (see Walkowitz, 1992, 88). Stretton explores the moral and emotional complexities of the behaviour and responses of both protagonists. At the novel's conclusion, however, it is Rose who dies and Robert who is eventually accepted back into family and society, an outcome which both reflects society's traditional patterns of moral judgement and exposes the greater material consequences for the woman.

¹⁸ In *Carola*, Stretton foregrounds the temptation to resort to drink in order to forget material surroundings and lack of possessions. Temperance stories such as *Nelly's Dark Days* (1870) deal with the effects of a father's dependence on drink.

¹⁹ Such sentiments echo those expressed in contemporary discussions of women's biological destiny. Sally Shuttleworth (1992, 35) quotes the assertion by J.M. Allen (1869, 35) that 'woman craves to be a mother, knowing that she is an imperfect undeveloped being, until she has borne a child'.

²⁰ Questions concerning the instinctual or biological basis for mothering have continued to be debated throughout the twentieth century, with varying emphases. For Nancy Chodorow (1978, 30), women's dominant mothering role is the result of a 'social and cultural translation' of their biological capacities rather than a natural or inevitable consequence of such capacities. In nineteenth-century discourse, the question of the innate nurturing capacity of the mother surfaces in response to various overlapping concerns. Jill Matus (1995), discussing Victorian debates surrounding issues of maternity and infanticide, states that 'conceptions of maternal instinct function to legitimate approved mothering behaviour, while constructions of deviance designate as unnatural the kind of mother that departs from the norm' (157). One means of recuperating the 'all-sacrificing, ministering mother in the face of apparently monstrous maternal acts was to argue that certain classes of women were losing their natural instincts through the effects of their physical and moral conditions' (157-8). There was disagreement among nineteenth-century commentators about the effects of economic pressures on the ability to mother; the issue became the subject of much public discussion - arousing a mixture of sympathy and condemnation. Attitudes to the role of drink in undermining maternal instincts are reflected in contemporary texts such as L.T. Meade's *Scamp and I* (1877), in which it is suggested that the 'love of strong drink had killed all other love in that woman's breast' (Ch.9). The sin of being 'drunk and disorderly' is seen, more than any other, as responsible for blighting homes, ruining children, spreading destruction, and sending souls to hell, with the physical condition of the child of a drunken mother acting as a lesson for all of the 'miseries' and 'punishment' of sin (Ch.19). Thomas Barnardo, in tracts such as "God's Little Girl", acknowledges that starvation and misery, often the consequences of desertion, cause women to take to gin and vice.

²¹ This attitude towards loss, and idea of the child as an encumbrance rather than a gift to be 'cherished', is echoed in an article in the *Saturday Review* which considers neglect (deliberate or unintentional) as a cause of infanticide:

The care of providing for a large family, and the hard life which it entails, reconcile many a mother, who in other circumstances would be tender and affectionate, to a bereavement which at all events diminishes her expenses (*The Saturday Review*, 22.10.1866, 481, quoted in Matus, 1995, 166).

As noted in Chapter 1 of this study, Stretton, discussing the maltreatment of children, stressed the idea of the child as potentially representing a 'burden and a hindrance' to poverty-stricken and degraded families (Letter to *The Times*, 8.1.1885).

²² In Stretton's *Hester Morley's Promise*, the adulterous Rose is an overt representation of the 'fallen mother'; the situation and motivation of the woman is examined sympathetically by Stretton, and shown

to be complex - worthy of understanding, if undesirable. In The Clives of Burcot (1867), Mrs. Ashworth is a working-class woman, traditionally 'compromised'. As we have seen, married mothers like Rachel in The Storm of Life represent both victimised mother and, as discussed in relation to sexual undercurrents, a 'euphemised' form of the sexually fallen woman/mother.

²³ A report in the Morning Star (5.1.1867) suggests that widowed or deserted women with no means of support are likely to be forced onto the streets in order to provide for their families. As Stretton shows, women from other classes, who are 'fallen', excluded and unsupported, like the adulterous Rose, in Hester Morley's Promise, may be reduced, along with their children, to the same abject poverty as those who have always lived in such conditions.

²⁴ Anna Davin (1996, 24-25) speaks of the self-abnegation of mothers, who were habitually the first casualties of poverty. It was the mother who put everyone else's needs before her own, going hungry when food was short and using her energy and self-denial as 'the first lines of defence when poverty advanced'. In Foucauldian terms, an assumption of the place of such self-denial and sacrifice by women is an intrinsic factor in mechanisms of control which operate through the 'gratification' generated by notions of sacrifice and duty.

²⁵ The treatment of Rachel leads Stretton to suggest, through her characters, the possibility of divorce. Earlier, in Alone in London (in relation to less dire circumstances) a character suggests the biblical requirement for a woman to remain with her husband, whatever his habits (Ch.6). The idea of divorce or legal separation on the grounds of emotional cruelty is explored more fully in The Doctor's Dilemma.

²⁶ The latter generalisation is, of course, in tension with her demonstration that some men are capable of exactly that.

²⁷ In 'Women's Work for Children' (1893, 4), Stretton, as we have seen, emphasises that in situations *where women have their rights* (my italics), childhood is likely to be happy.

²⁸ Kate Flint speaks of the tensions between the social assumptions structuring the circumstances of the plot, and the 'sympathies which are called out towards the transgressive heroines' (1993, 293). Such conflict is particularly pertinent to Stretton's representation of the moral conduct of a number of protagonists. In this respect, Stretton's writing can be compared with Mrs. Gaskell, with whose work, as discussed, it also shares numerous contemporary preoccupations and motifs. A commitment to the sentiment of 'there, but for the Grace of God ...', which emerges in Stretton's story 'Alice Gilbert's Confession' (1862), is perhaps at the heart of Stretton's seeming ambivalence, suggesting a recognition of the 'other' in the self.

²⁹ Mrs. Gaskell, in Ruth (1853/1997, 157), refers to romantic 'castle-building', such as that encouraged by the fiction produced by the Minerva Press, as an outlet providing escape from 'the pressure of [a] prosaic life'. In Stretton's Paul's Courtship, the protagonist is a 'Minerva Press' poetess (The Athenaeum, 15.6.1867). The idea of fiction as basic sustenance is highlighted by the fact that Stretton's Mrs. Tilly is content, provided that she can 'get novels enough, and sufficient food to keep her from hunger' (Cassy Ch.10).

³⁰ In relation to my earlier comments (Chapter 3) regarding fictional empowerment of child characters, the metafictional emphasis and fictional events in Cassy also give weight to the idea of empowerment as real and not merely compensatory for women.

³¹ Historian Ellen Ross (1993, 84-5) writes of the acceptance of husband-wife violence as a right: male violence constituted 'one of the daily fixtures' of married life, with husbands 'practically by definition, violent'. (See also my discussion of the 'normalisation' of violence in the eyes of children, in Chapter 3.5 of this study.) Significantly, Ross also suggests that in accounts of poverty (by women as social workers), poor women may, in effect, have been 'speaking on behalf of their better-off sisters'. Stories of cruelty and abuse perhaps 'functioned as concealed statements about middle-class marriage' (20). This can be linked with the idea of Stretton's texts, in various respects, as vehicles of identification for middle-class children/girls. Shared anxieties are expressed and recognised, and as Sally Mitchell (1995, 153) comments, the knowledge is 'made safe by locating it in an outcast class'.

³² In Two Secrets (1882), the task of worrying about 'the morrow' - 'or how 'ud the work get done?' - again falls to the mother. Protagonists such as the eponymous Hester Morley, on the borders of middle/trade-class society, have been brought up in the 'practical school of poverty' (Ch.42). The idea of women having to take responsibility and exercise prudence when men fail properly to manage family or business affairs arises, as discussed, in Stretton's journals and underlies numerous textual themes.

³³ The Soul of Honour (Ch.7); The Highway of Sorrow (Ch.9); A Man of His Word (Ch.1); Half Brothers (Ch.20).

³⁴ In Stretton's In The Hollow of His Hand, the women take particular pleasure in hearing how Jesus treated the women and children (Ch.28). In the case of Cassy, however, the statements quoted contain a

greater degree of irony; the question of the exploitation of the child's voice, and the identification of the ironic element by younger readers is, as suggested, potentially problematical. Arguably, however, Cassy's assertions, despite overtones of naivety, simultaneously reveal her own materially derived feelings of oppression and convey an acute assessment of the wider implications. In line with the arguments of Stahl (1990), we can suggest that the overall level of engagement/identification with the sense of vulnerability and marginalisation recognised by the female child promotes, for all ages of reader, a degree of appreciation and interrogation of the situation which underlies the irony.

³⁵ We can recognise a correspondence between the terminology which characterises Stretton's work and that employed by John Stuart Mill in 'The Subjection of Women'. Mill writes that 'originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband. ... the father had the power to dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers' (1869/1998, 502). Sometimes alluding to customs in other countries, Stretton intimates that such a situation still obtains in England; her themes/ideas - including those voiced in narratives which pre-date Mill's publication - chime with his view that 'the wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called' (503). Mill, writing on the subject of the equality of women in the family, discusses their subordination in domestic life; he points to men's desire that wives should be 'willing' slaves, and the emphasis, in women's upbringing, on submission, abnegation of self and yielding to the control of others (486). In his essay, he identifies male intolerance of the idea of living with an equal (524) and stresses the individual and social benefits of liberating women from a 'life of subjection to the will of others' (576).

³⁶ In this text, it is the mournful atmosphere of the marital home which both precipitates the woman's fall and softens her culpability.

³⁷ The notion of women as property is, of course, crucial to the idea of the right to inflict physical 'chastisement'. Susan Hamilton quotes the statement by Frances Power Cobbe, in 1878, on the issue of 'Wife Torture in England', that 'the whole relation between the sexes in the class we are considering is very little better than one of master and slave' (2000, 441-2). As Hamilton notes, the master-slave comparison is frequently invoked in nineteenth-century discourse and is used with ease by Cobbe, indicating its 'centrality in feminist thought' (446). Stretton clearly views the analogy as appropriate to women's situation across classes, and to a variety of circumstances.

³⁸ Harriet Taylor (whose opinions influenced John Stuart Mill, to whom she was married in 1851) writes in 'The Enfranchisement of Women': 'Give such a man the idea that he is first in law and in opinion - that to will is his part, and hers to submit; it is absurd to suppose that this idea merely glides over his mind ... he becomes either the conscious or unconscious despot of his household' (1850/Pyle (ed.), 1995, 30).

³⁹ Stretton's diary (19.3.1861) includes an undoubtedly mocking reference to the description by a male acquaintance of a 'marriageable young lady' as one who would 'lay her head on a young man's lap, look up in his face, say "dearest", and quote a text of scripture'.

⁴⁰ Sandra Lee Bartky (1988), drawing on the ideas of Michel Foucault in her discussion of femininity and patriarchal power, suggests the 'inferiorization of women's bodies' as evidenced in common differences between masculine and feminine bodily comportment, with differences in posture part of a 'language of subordination' (73). She points to a greater restriction in women's 'spatiality' (66), with men, by contrast, 'expand[ing] into the available space' (67).

⁴¹ Prochaska (1980, 12) cites the argument of the prominent nineteenth-century rescue worker, Ellice Hopkins, that as Christianity advanced, there would be a concomitant disappearance of the inequalities between the sexes.

⁴² Mrs. Gaskell, in *Mary Barton*, also highlights the perception of domestic servitude as 'a species of slavery' (1848/1987, 26). The use of such imagery in relation to the home and to the wider sphere accentuates the overlap between the domestic and the political.

⁴³ Men are perceived as less threatening when older or incapacitated, again suggesting 'castration'.

⁴⁴ Uncle Simister (like all philosophers, according to his view) 'hate[s] women'; he takes exception to their 'chattering and gadding about', their tendency to go into 'hysterics', and to 'make a dust wherever they go' with their 'draggle-tailed petticoats' (Ch.7). Simister also dislikes the idea of heaven if all the angels are women, as implied by the way they are depicted with 'big curls' and long 'trailing' gowns (Ch. 9). In *A Thorny Path*, the protagonist asserts, 'The more I dwell on it, the more difference I see betwixt men and women' (Ch.7).

⁴⁵ In *Half Brothers*, Colonel Cleveland would prefer women to be obedient - to remain in their place at home, and not to 'go gadding about in public, blocking up the streets, and hindering business in the shops' (Ch.5). The narrative tone makes it clear that Stretton does not condone this sentiment.

⁴⁶ Once again underlining the pervasive motif of slavery, and the perceived duty of women to drudge and toil for their masters, the writer of the article states: 'From the absolute power of a savage over his slaves flow all those rights over a woman from which the marital rights of our own time are the genealogical descendants ...' (The Westminster Review, April 1876, quoted in Besant, 1882/1987, 395). In her essay, Besant discusses the failings of the law, and the gradual, but inadequate changes brought about by the Married Women's Property Acts during the 1870s. In the process, she identifies many of the inequities highlighted by Stretton, and similarly stresses men's tyranny/despotism. She also rebuts the criticisms of 'those who like "a man to be master in his own house"' (417), and draws on the remarks of 'the thoughtful author of the Rights of Women', to emphasise, like Stretton, that 'married women rank among the "persons in subjection to the power of others"' (412/413). Advocating equality, Besant continues, 'It is time to do away with the oak and ivy ideal, and to teach each plant to grow strong and self-supporting (418).

⁴⁷ Mrs. Henry Wood alludes to this painting in East Lynne (1861, Part 3, Ch. 10).

⁴⁸ E.A. Kaplan (1992, 81), discussing the 'bad' mother type, argues that 'female jealousy, possessiveness and competition are the product of woman's "incompleteness", her positioning in patriarchy as object, not subject'.

⁴⁹ Also implicated are the issues of illegitimacy and infanticide already discussed. In addition, there is the obvious link with the notion of being 'lost' spiritually or morally. Interestingly, Stretton also engages with the idea of a woman's child being 'lost to her' when that child matures and is no longer dependent on her for nurture and protection (Stretton, 'Women's Work', 1893, 4.)

⁵⁰ Possibly manifested, for example, in the alleged dream of 'two babies' alluded to in Chapter 1.2 of this study (Log Book: January 1861). The young bride, Rose, in Hester Morley's Promise, longs to feel the warmth and closeness of a child.

⁵¹ She notes the particularities of the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter relationship, which is relevant to Stretton's representations of various mother-daughter unions. This relationship may be characterised by stronger and prolonged primary identification and symbiosis, involving boundary confusion and the lack of a sense of separateness. Separation and individuation are only partial, with the mother and daughter remaining emotionally bound up with each other. Chodorow writes that 'cathexis of daughters is more likely to retain and emphasise narcissistic elements, that is, to be based on experiencing a daughter as an extension or double of a mother herself' (1978, 109).

⁵² Similar patterns are evident in other nineteenth-century texts, such as Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth (1853), and Mrs. Henry Wood's East Lynne (1861), where the yearning to be bound up in, and to some extent dependent on, the child/children is a strong element in the text.

⁵³ Feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva consider various aspects of the maternal, highlighting the fluid 'oceanic' imagery of the female body and unconscious rhythms and pulses related to the pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic relation. (For a discussion of the various ideas, see, for example, Toril Moi (ed.) (1985) and Jean Wyatt (1990); see also Kristeva (1986) 'Revolution in Poetic Language'.) David Gooderham (1994), in his article 'Deep Calling unto Deep: Pre-ocdipal Structures in Children's Texts', draws on the work of Kristeva to facilitate understanding of the 'primordial and resonating features of text and response' (114). He explores the power of deep, pre-linguistic structures, patterns and rhythms in texts to promote engagement beyond the level of rational understanding. In considering symbiotic unity, it is perhaps pertinent to reiterate the fact of Stretton's enduring 'symbiotic' - perhaps substitute - relationship with her sister Elizabeth, and the blurring of the identities of the two in their shared writing of the earlier sections of the diaries.

⁵⁴ On another level, the child, again represented as the blond angel, might be seen as the pure (uncorrupted by sexual union) version of the mother, just as the uncorrupted young Hester Morley becomes the object of Robert Waldron's desire after her stepmother has become tainted through union with him.

⁵⁵ The intermingling of religious and maternal currents serves not only to foreground the relationship between the sacred and the maternal, but to suggest an overlap between spiritual ecstasy and the pre-Oedipal. (At the same time, of course, it functions, in certain instances, to mask the physical and sexual implications of childbirth; Stretton, like many contemporary writers, avoids physical details of pregnancy and birth.) The idea of the mother's own personality flowing into the child (Half Brothers) can be viewed at various levels, from an affirmative feminist-psychoanalytical perspective of pre-Oedipal fusion, to a religious analogy, or, indeed, to a negative perception of loss of identity in terms of the institution of motherhood, with suggestions of the abject. The trance-like nature of passages cited suggests a state of transcendence. Stretton's diaries, and texts such as David Lloyd's Last Will, indicate ambivalence on the subject of religious 'experiences' and intensely spiritual (i.e. completely non-practical) states of mind.

⁵⁶ Such girls - whose souls apparently 'hanker[ed] sorely after feathers and flowers' - needed direction to counteract, among other tendencies, their 'quite Oriental' love of 'gorgeous colouring' (Sellers, 1893, 37-38), a view which underlines the connection between race and class in terms of excess. Stretton, in The Soul of Honour (Ch.20) comments on the importance of colour to the mulatto.

⁵⁷ See my reference (Chapter 1.9) to Stretton's comments in 'Women's Work for Children' (1893, 4). Such a view is reinforced in Hester Morley's Promise, in which Hester finds it natural to act as mother to the abandoned child of her stepmother, even though she has previously had no contact with children (Ch.54, entitled, significantly, 'Alone in London'). In The Soul of Honour, working with crippled children serves to 'satisfy and develop' a protagonist's motherly instinct (Ch.11). A rare example of a mother who lacks 'natural warmth' towards her children because of personal rather than economic/material limitations is the writer Felicita (Cobwebs and Cables).

⁵⁸ Charlotte Yonge (1876, 102) writes that it was no longer considered unfeminine for women to 'penetrate the back slums of London'. Critics such as Judith Walkowitz (1992) and Deborah Epstein Nord (1995) discuss women's increasing involvement - arguably transgressive and border-crossing - in 'slumming', and the position of women on the margins, occupying liminal territory, as urban investigators.

⁵⁹ The extent to which such mothering is viewed as generous and nurturing, or as a function of manipulative or 'civilising' social intervention/control is open to argument, and might influence a designation of 'good' or 'bad' mother. As Lynda Nead (1988, 197) points out, philanthropy has been seen to represent not only a route to female emancipation, but also a strategy for class regulation. It is, perhaps, ironic that, as women like Stretton were being liberated from the home, and were able to move more freely *into* the streets to engage in activities such as rescue work, children were being increasingly withdrawn, albeit for the best of motives, *from* the streets into a more protected domestic environment.

CHAPTER 6

OUTCAST SOCIETY AND SOCIETY'S OUTCASTS

6.1 People, places and perceptions

It has already been established that the figures under scrutiny in preceding chapters (i.e. children (in general/diverse categories) and women (as an overall category, and as particular figures) are inextricably bound up with broader perceptions and representations of outcast society; the complex and ambiguous response towards these figures, which simultaneously evoke fear, revulsion, fascination and pity, has been suggested. This section will explore, and contextualise, Hesba Stretton's portrayal of 'outcast society' - a phrase which embodies an abstract concept as well as ideas of place, people and specific groups/sub-cultures. Stretton's representations of particular sections of outcast society, and within the outcast city, will also be examined, together with her exploration of class relations and her interrogation/critique of authority and social structures. Issues already raised will be developed within the context of this chapter, new themes will be introduced, and links established, with specific attention to the implications of overlapping imagery and metaphor. Further consideration will be given to the ways in which her work serves to provide a political voice to the marginalised¹.

The notion of outcast society is both general and particular, with the two aspects converging. As previous sections of my study have demonstrated, the threat of chaos and disorder is characterised by particular images, and as we have seen, many of the figures which are central to Stretton's themes became, in the Victorian imagination, emblematic of the dirt, disorder and lawlessness associated with the residuum and the so-called 'nether regions'. The naked or dirty street-child, as Judith Walkowitz (1992, 117) observes, indicates a tainted neighbourhood; child and class are one, and, as a different part of the same equation, the poor, as a category, may be infantilised from a middle-class stance.² Images of the child beggar or the young delinquent and their adult counterparts, which include the slum mother and the prostitute (actual or potential), are

conflated with notions of criminality and urban degeneracy; they both symbolise, and are held responsible for, moral, physical and social disintegration. There are close associations between the topography of the urban neighbourhood and the topography of the female body, typified in the multi-layered gothic imagery of the East End in Little Meg's Children, with its labyrinth of blind alleys, low arched passages and dark gullies (Ch.1). Such literal and metaphorical expression reflects associations between the spread of physical disease and moral corruption within confined spaces (Mason, 1994, 234; Nord, 1995, 9), and is bound up with anxieties about the permeability of class barriers, issues which are constantly enacted in Stretton's work.

This study has highlighted the perceived threat to nineteenth-century class barriers and social stability posed by the so-called 'dangerous classes' - a fear which can be seen to underlie society's diverse attitudes to, and its methods of dealing with, those elements which were considered potentially disruptive and anarchic. Responses to issues of poverty, crime and moral/social conditions (and the practical and mythological interaction between these factors) were influenced by such perceptions; approaches to charity and philanthropy, although subject to fluctuation in relation to shifting economic and political conditions/ideas over the period under consideration, were conditioned in part by similar fears. The proliferation of all kinds of literary and extra-literary representations of the outcast classes over the course of the Victorian period betrays the deeply rooted and complex nature of ongoing class anxieties, and underlines society's obsession with the 'outcast' - an obsession which, itself, has been the focus of continued critical attention, from various perspectives.³ Examination of diverse categories of text and discourse reveals the construction and reinforcement of personal and group identities/projections of 'otherness' operating within a circular and self-perpetuating network which is inextricably bound up with, and works to sustain, prevailing social, political and psychological anxieties and guilts.

6.2 Urban images

A central focus of Victorian social concern was the overpopulated city, with its slums and rookeries,⁴ and its association with underground activities. Fears regarding the effects of poverty and overcrowding, of the erosion of class divisions and of the actions of the mob, underlie reactions and perceptions. Such responses are interlinked with fear

of the urban 'other' (and, at the same time, of becoming the 'other'), concerns which feed into, and are fed by, the construction of urban images and discourses. Gareth Stedman Jones (1985, 224) quotes Sir Charles Trevelyan's description in 1870 of the metropolis as a 'common sink of everything that is worst in the United Kingdom'. Fiction and non-fiction alike, over a considerable period and from a number of perspectives, reveal the preoccupation with depicting, examining and regulating the poor of the city. In discussing the city itself as a text to be read, and as part of his examination of nineteenth-century journalistic depictions, Rodger (1990, 67), comments that it was possible to encounter similar portrayals in any of the daily newspapers throughout the English-speaking world, because of the commonality of the representational field from which the characterisations were drawn. Although, as noted, Stretton's texts embrace diverse social and geographical situations, and poverty or inequality is a central concern in various different contexts, many of her stories have urban themes and settings; sometimes the city is Manchester, often it is London. These narratives revolve around the poor districts and their inhabitants, and frequently contrast these locations with more affluent areas, highlighting the differences and barriers between them. The sense of dislocation, alienation and invisibility often associated with the metropolis is also highlighted in her work. The protagonist of Stretton's Bede's Charity (1872) feels, like other of Stretton's characters, 'a stranger and alone in the streets of London' (Ch.6), where sometimes such 'strangers have been lost for ever' (Ch.14), and which represents 'a great network' of physical and mental confusion (Ch. 25).⁵ Elsewhere, Stretton identifies a 'depressing sense of forlornness in the midst of crowds', an impression of being engulfed in a 'tideless sea of humanity' as 'one of the masses, a unit amid a million ... utterly insignificant ... an atom as absolutely unimportant as a grain of sand on a limitless shore' (The Soul of Honour, 1898, Chs.7 and 11).

Stretton's concerns and representations in many ways resonate with the plethora of images to be found in the many kinds of 'factual' report, in visual texts, and in the fiction of writers such as Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell. In all these portrayals, the intermingling, in different configurations, of material fact, fiction and myth is evident, as is the convergence of language and metaphor across the various genres; these interrelationships have also received much attention over recent years from feminist and

cultural critics. As Rodger (1990, 69) suggests, the repetition of this plethora of overlapping metaphors acted to encapsulate commonsense realities, and fix them in the popular imagination. It seems important to consider the role played by Stretton's work in the construction, perpetuation and interrogation of cultural meanings, as part of a wider critical scrutiny. It is my intention to locate her writing within the context of the broad network of discourses and representations of the city, and to demonstrate the relationship of her work to the multiple concerns operating within this matrix.

One problem which arises in relation to the ubiquity of these representations of city-dwellers is related to the stereotypical nature of images, which may serve to reinforce perceptions, or which may simply become ineffective in drawing attention to individual experiences or social conditions. If we look at the many accounts of outcast society, descriptions of individual figures often form part of a wider, depersonalised, image of outcast society; representations do not, in the main, serve to give a voice to the oppressed or disenfranchised, who are seen as part of what Matthew Arnold described as 'those vast, miserable, unmanageable masses of sunken people' (1869/1966, 193, quoted by Stedman Jones, 1984, 241). Such a description underlines the absence of any sense of individual identity which characterises many accounts; as Benjamin Waugh (1873/1984, 169/170) points out in relation to perceptions of a common 'lump', particularities and differences were obscured as part of an impression that 'to the genus poor there are no species'. The multiplicity of clichéd images can be seen as acting potentially to raise social awareness but at the same time to de-sensitise responses to the situation of the poor, part of what Susan Casteras (1995) describes as society's 'looking at yet overlooking' of human beings (265).

Victorian representations of city scenes often focus on impressions and generalised descriptions. As Judith Walkowitz (1992, 27) comments, in the last decades of the century 'the particularity of slum life had disappeared'; the 'same monotonous and sensational slum scene' reappeared in the memoirs and writings of socialist feminists and charity organisation visitors (55). Contemporary social explorer George Sims observed in 'How the Poor Live' that 'scene after scene is the same. Rags, dirt, filth, wretchedness, the same figures, the same faces' (Sims, 1889/Keating (ed.), 1976, 77), and the bare attics occupied by Little Meg and her fellow protagonists resemble the slum attics and rooms which Sims describes (1889/1976, 71).⁶ The repetition of

material in literary and visual representations, the attention paid to stereotypical bodily characteristics, to facial features and conditions of dress, result in caricature and contribute to a totalising fiction which denies individual identity, and fails to represent subjects. Fascination with city squalor and the situation of the poor is not confined to written texts, but is evident in the abundance of artistic and photographic representations. Yet even photography, a medium presented (certainly during the period in question) as capturing existential reality, is selective and manipulative, controlled by those with the power to observe. All these forms of representation, presented by the outsider, must always be problematic. Viewed through the lens of middle-class anxiety, interest or concern, the poor are repeatedly represented as objects.⁷ The sense of detachment associated with the notion of the disadvantaged as 'project' or 'hobby' is reflected in the observation, from the perspective of one of Stretton's characters, that the way the poor lived 'presented to him an interesting problem, to which the usual gatherings of ordinary society were flat and dull' (Half Brothers, 1892, Ch.8). The nature of the scrutiny forms part of an enterprise which can, once again, be seen to be potentially voyeuristic, even in its philanthropic aspects; such complexities must inevitably be borne in mind when looking at texts which take the marginalised as their project. In this respect it is pertinent to consider Pamela K. Gilbert's discussion of the way in which 'the misery of the exploited classes itself can be exploited and turned to account' (Gilbert, 1997, 41). The object of concern becomes the 'subject and substance of the text', with the textual reproductions of the 'refuse' of society 'packaged and sold' to the readership (41). Clearly, we cannot entirely exempt Stretton, as a writer with inevitably mixed motives, from such a charge of 'commodification', but at the same time it is necessary to take other, mitigating, considerations into account.

In considering Stretton's representations and their interaction with wider portrayals, we can identify general descriptions of the slums and their inhabitants which echo those found in fictional texts, in newspaper articles and the accounts of social explorers. The narrow, 'pent-up' alleys and light-starved courts, with their 'sickening smells' of refuse and decay (Alone in London, Ch.1, among many instances) are part of the same actual and mythological topography as Dickens's miserable streets and stagnant gutters and Sims's and Mearns's later sensational journalistic portrayals of London. The same

descriptions of 'miserable, shrivelled, meagre wretch[es]' (Pilgrim Street, Ch.12 and others), of ragged, barefoot children, gaunt hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed men and degraded 'staggering' women with hysterical, high-pitched laughs (for example, Jessica's mother or Tatters in The Lord's Pursebearers) appear in fictional and non-fictional accounts; they are emphasised and repeated so that they risk being nothing more than types.⁸ Stretton's depictions of the poor were, as discussed, drawn from first-hand experience, and frequently the detail of her description works to personalise and convince. At the same time, the problems of representation lead her replicate to some extent the stereotypical negative images in ways which both expose and perpetuate them.⁹

There is a sense that Stretton feels the need to drive home, sometimes through repetition of these clichéd descriptions, the severity of the conditions she describes, for fear of the reader's disbelief. In this, she echoes a tendency among all those who report on the condition of the poor to comment that the misery which they attempt to portray must be seen to be believed. As Stretton emphasises in The Lord's Pursebearers (1883), visitors to the East End find 'squalor and degradation such as they never dreamed of' (Ch.9), a situation which recalls Dickens's contention in his much earlier Sketches by Boz, that 'the filthy and miserable appearance' of certain areas of London 'can hardly be imagined by those ... who have not witnessed it' (Dickens, 1839/1995, 217). Hugh Cunningham (1991, 106), quotes Lord Ashley's mid-century assertion in relation to the slums, that 'language is powerless to exhibit the truth', while investigative journalists such as Andrew Mearns felt, like Stretton, the need to stress that their accounts of slum life were no exaggeration. Indeed, many of the 'horrors' could never be reproduced by 'pen or artist's pencil' (Mearns, 1883/Keating (ed.) 1976, 98). This recognition of the inadequacy of language, the impossibility of representation, is borne out by a correspondent for the Pall Mall Gazette in January 1867. Reporting on a visit to the East End, he tells of 'feeble women' with 'woebegone children' in their arms, moving slowly through the streets, 'the bleak easterly wind rustling through the few garments left to them'. The writer adds: 'of the hard gaze of want which belongs to half the people we met, I will attempt no description' (Pall Mall Gazette, 26.1.1867, 4). In similar vein, Stretton also demonstrates the equally complex problem of the spectator's response: the narrator of Bede's Charity, passing through the poor districts of London,

regards the 'dwarfed, ugly, and famished' children with 'an aching there are no words for' (Ch.21); in The Lord's Pursebearers, there is confirmation that 'words fail, and my heart fails, to describe' the condition of such children. Stretton admits a reluctance to confront the reader with the extremes: 'I *would* not, if I could, describe to you in full the wretchedness' (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.11). At the same time, she also acknowledges the failure of the commonplace to shock: passers-by take no heed of the miserable, crouched figure of the young protagonist in Cassy (Ch.4); the narrator in A Thorny Path (Ch.19) observes that a verdict of death by starvation 'is growing common enough to lose its power of giving a shock to the hundreds of thousands of hearths where comfort and ease abound'. Stretton furnishes us with statistics - in this case, the figure of seventy-seven deaths from starvation in London the previous year - in order to underline authenticity. In her later writings, increasingly uncontained anger and indignation combine with repeated - and now much more detailed - descriptions of environmental and bodily states, to exert a force which serves to undermine the effects of stereotypes.¹⁰

As the essays by Susan Casteras and Richard L. Stein (1995) show in relation to street figures in art/urban iconography, the anonymity of generalisations serves to distance and render the poor less threatening. Casteras, interestingly, makes the point that in Victorian art, the victims are shown as 'humiliated and made passive and silent by their circumstances', and that rarely is there any sign of 'insurgent or revolutionary protest or action by the poor' (278). This idea raises some interesting questions when we consider Stretton's work. We have noted in previous chapters the cowed postures and evident powerlessness of the poor as exposed by Stretton's representations, and by particular illustrations to the texts, and have now considered the implications of repetitive stereotypical depictions. However, the potential effects of certain 'typical' images need to be seen in relation to their juxtaposition in Stretton's work with individualised representations, with the social critique implied by the attention drawn to the inequality of power relations, and with the potentially revolutionary elements/voices within her texts. Exposure of powerlessness is juxtaposed with interrogation of the exploitation, and a degree of empowerment achieved through currents of condemnation, protest or resistance. This takes place through the narrative/authorial voice or through the responses of characters, as I have suggested in relation to the situation of women and

children, and will continue to demonstrate as part of my focus on social/authority relations.

6.3 Metaphors of otherness

As posited in my initial thesis, Hesba Stretton's texts embody and highlight the overlapping strands of imagery which circulate within converging and competing discourses, many of which coalesce in Stretton's thematic and generic interests/interplay. As numerous historians have pointed out, the language of disease and decay is common to descriptions of the outcast city, and to the outcast within it, in a variety of contexts, from religious and moral concerns to issues of health and housing conditions.¹¹ Metaphors of the body, waste, pollution and contamination permeate the overlapping discourses; Davidoff (1995, 105) notes the use of such phrases as 'stagnant pools of moral filth' and 'effluvia of our wretched cities' in references to the regions inhabited by the criminal classes, paupers and beggars, and cites the attention drawn by historians to the 'disturbing equations made by commentators, such as Mayhew, between the sanitary and the human condition'. Hesba Stretton, in fictional and factual accounts, alludes to the 'quagmire of foulness', the 'weltering mass of slime' (Cobwebs and Cables, Ch.29), and the 'slime of the pit' ('Women's Work for Children', 1893, 11). Such equations suggest the qualities of the 'abject', the unstable boundaries between inner and outer, self and other - the necessary expulsion of that which defiles but sustains the 'clean and proper body' and disturbs identity, system and order - as discussed by Kristeva in Powers of Horror (1982). They also underline the notion of the body as a 'fundamental site of social construction and control' (Gooderham 1996, 227), in line with Foucauldian theories.¹² Discourses of the body function to influence wider cultural perceptions; concepts of dirt and cleanliness or respectability are brought into play in the formation/perpetuation of class and gender identities, as well as strategies of separation/exercise of authority (areas which are both reflected and contested in Hesba Stretton's work). As Stretton shows in In Prison and Out, David's social and moral decline is manifested in, and symbolised by, his bodily grease, which evokes disgust and renders him untouchable, reinforcing his social exclusion and threatening to deny him even family identity (Ch.17). At the same time, it could be argued that the 'otherness' which makes his sister recoil also carries a physical charge which adds to a possible erotic undercurrent embodied in the 'hot feverish' kiss which,

as noted, takes place between brother and sister.¹³ Significantly, the encounter between the two protagonists takes place, as do other such encounters, on a London bridge, suggesting this as a literal and metaphorical site of inter-class transmission.

Stretton's inhabitants of the slums are often characterised by their appearance - identified by, and reduced to, body images which reflect notions of the grotesque. On more than one occasion in her texts, human beings are initially mistaken for, and their image elided with, 'heaps of rags' (for example, Jessica's Mother, Ch.3; Bede's Charity, Ch.8). Self-image is shown to be constructed through body image: the 'ragged' and 'overgrown' Joan, in The Lord's Pursebearers, feels 'as if I was all grime with dirt' (Ch.3). Bodily appearance defines status, determines social acceptability and constrains freedom and choice. Cassy's 'unwashed face', 'uncombed hair', and 'dirty and ragged frock' (Cassy, Ch.4) will render her unsuitable for any employment; Jessica's ragged appearance is perceived by Daniel as likely to prove offensive to the sensibilities of the middle-class congregation (Jessica's First Prayer, Ch.3); Mrs. Clack's poor clothes preclude her association with the other dressmakers, and for Hagar in that text rags are a 'badge of poverty' (A Thorny Path, Chs.10 and 9). The oppositional identities of good and bad mother in Lost Gip are defined partly by their dress and states of cleanliness/'decency', reflecting moral and social coding as well as fears of literal contamination.¹⁴ As I shall discuss further in relation to inter/intra-class distinctions, close proximity to what might be termed the 'slum body' is generally seen to be discouraged. In the case of Carola, others 'shrink' from her because she is perceived as contaminated by her association with street life (Carola, Ch.15); Philip's existence, as noted, will be soiled by his contact with her (Ch.19), his homestead defiled by the memory of her. Furthermore, as Pamela K. Gilbert (1997, 39) observes, physical dirt was seen as *literally* immoral and potentially the cause of degeneration. In a different geographical setting, but with the same connotations, the moral distinctions between Stretton's exiled Stundists and their criminal prison companions (In the Hollow of His Hand) are underscored by the bodily distinctions. The former, so accustomed to cleanliness, are subject to, and degraded by, 'enforced defilement' though their proximity to the 'matted hair' and 'begrimed faces' of the latter (Ch.18).

Interfused with these metaphors of bodily and spiritual cleanliness are the evaluative Manichaeian polarities of black and white, dark and light, good and evil, savage and

civilised, which characterise the discourse of the underworld of poverty and degradation, reinforcing many kinds of 'difference' and operating to maintain class barriers and those between self and other. These binary oppositions overlap with the language of other dominant discourses, some of which are allied and some in conflict. Leonore Davidoff (1995, 127), in her analysis of class and gender in Victorian England, discusses the significance of black and white imagery, with its biblical roots, and the overlap of this symbolism with the discourses of colonialism; throughout this study we have seen that such antagonisms have been foregrounded in relation to perceptions of otherness. They are applicable to both the physical appearance and the moral and spiritual implications of the urban slum, and it is therefore not surprising that they permeate Stretton's work, preoccupied as it is with religious themes, social conditions and civilising missions, consequently reflecting this web of perceptions regarding outcast society in all its elements.

The pervasive use of black and white imagery is, for example, illustrated in Stretton's text The Storm of Life (1876), which foregrounds the complex relationship between ideas of depravity and social deprivation, through its juxtaposition of the language of individual sin and the portrayal of material circumstances. The darkness of the 'close' courts where no sunlight enters is a moral and emotional, as well as a physical, darkness - a blackness of despair and of wickedness. Allusions to sin and misery are juxtaposed with multiple references to darkness, dirt and cleanliness throughout, in what might seem to be unrelated instances until one begins to note their frequency. The account of Rachel's journey through the dark streets, and of her thoughts of suicide as she passes the dark river, is succeeded by her arrest/rescue by the chimney-sweep Sylvanus, whose house has white curtains, and a good fire which 'shed a bright gleam into the darkness'.¹⁵ Sylvanus washes off the grime of his employment and puts on a clean linen jacket. The bedroom is 'a white room; the bedhangings and counterpane, the window-curtains and the great dimity-covered easy-chair standing by the fire, were as spotlessly white as they could be in the smoke of London' (Ch.8), a description which throws into sharp focus the 'lost and degraded' appearance of the bedraggled Rachel and her 'vagrant, dirty and forlorn' castaway child. The language reflects the Victorian obsession with domestic cleanliness, and its relationship with the possibility of a moral and spiritual regeneration. The imagery recurs in different aspects throughout the text,

reinforcing the concept of a 'dark thread' 'woven into the web of her life', which is contrasted with, for example, the 'pure and glittering white' snow after the storm, and with the 'thin white covering' thrown over her dead baby, saved by death from the contamination of a city whose rookeries of poor streets represent a 'hell upon earth' (Ch.20).¹⁶ Stretton suggests an accommodation of polarities: Sylvanus protects the fabric of the house from becoming dingy, for the love of a wife who is 'spruce and clean', and 'yet she married me, a master sweep'. Such oppositions of black and white, clean and dirty, pure and impure are reminiscent of the imagery which pervades texts such as Charles Kingsley's The Water-Babies (1863). What is, of course, conventional religious imagery is woven into Stretton's narrative to multiple effect, incorporating, among other aspects, the implied conflation of class and race (which is itself reinforced by the diverse contextual binaries operating in slum literature). At the same time, as suggested in my earlier discussion of moral complexity in relation to The Storm of Life, and in my focus on aspects of criminality, the symbolism is juxtaposed with overt social comment which renders the effect more complex; 'black and white' moral certainty is undercut. It might be argued that Stretton's narratives interweave moral and material blackness, and through her interrogation of causes and her compassion for individual situations, negotiate a path between the environment as hell because of the nature of its inhabitants, and urban conditions as hell *for* them.¹⁷

In Victorian discourse, the street-walker, drunkard or criminal may be represented as part of the semiotics of an alluring or exciting and forbidden 'underworld', a world in need of rescue and redemption, which also serves as a projection of the darker side of society in general. Stretton's depictions frequently evoke this common impression of the city as Inferno, a 'horrible pit of sin, foulness, and misery' (Bede's Charity, Ch.14; The Storm of Life, Ch.17); the East End of Carola and other texts matches Stedman Jones's (1984, 283) assessment of views of the "residuum" as 'herded into slums, where religion, propriety, and civilisation were impossible, interspersed with criminals, prostitutes, deprived of light and air, craving for drink and "cheap excitement" ... large enough to engulf civilized London'. At the same time, the 'flaring' gin-palaces which constitute such an attraction to Carola represented a 'heaven-on earth' to the inhabitants of the slums.¹⁸ As Brian Harrison (1973, 172) observes, pubs 'lay at the heart of the London underworld'; part of the informal collective life of the community in working-

class areas, they represented a cultural and political threat, and evoked a mixture of fear and fascination in the observer. Arguably, literature such as that produced by the Temperance Societies, with the intention of condemning/deterring vice, may also serve to encourage illicit pleasures, again by virtue of the presence/allure of the forbidden. As Gilbert (1997, 10) confirms, texts such as the religious tracts, written in response to the 'low', cannot exist without that context. On the one hand, it is clear that the overriding message of narratives such as Carola is the need to move away, both physically and morally, from such an environment. We have seen that, with the gradual 'taming' of her passions, she 'tingles' with shame at the recollection of the hell-like 'pit' of the East End, with its 'demoralised men and women' and its 'pollution, darkness and degradation' (Ch.14). On the other hand, the city as 'excess', the pull of an 'active outdoor life', full of 'change and stir'¹⁹ exerted by an existence 'in and out of the gin-palaces' (Ch.1) is painted with such a sense of acknowledgement by Stretton regarding the allure a life free of restraints that the reader is potentially drawn to such currents, which compete with the didactic content. As I have argued, the tensions created apparently derive, in part, from Stretton's own frustrations and resistance to restriction or containment; the repeated use of terms such as 'shackles' and 'trammels', is telling. Texts such as The Soul of Honour (1898) also engage with the late nineteenth-century celebration of the urban, identifying the 'spell' cast by the City - the 'humour' and 'passion' inherent in some of the scenes which, mingled with a dark mysteriousness, appeal to the imagination and inspire a 'fascinated disquietude' (Ch.11).

This is perhaps an appropriate point to reintroduce an element to which I have previously referred, and to suggest the implications of the 'dramatisation' of the City. As discussed in earlier sections, recent historians have drawn attention to the City and its inhabitants as theatre, and its presentation in diverse but interlinked spheres as melodrama. Stretton herself points to the validity - and paradoxical nature - of such identification when, as narrator-protagonist, she writes, in The Soul of Honour (1898), of the 'tragedies and comedies being acted everywhere [in the City], in the presence of spectators who paid little heed to them' (Ch.11). The connection with melodrama or sensation, and its relationship to the convergence of factual and fictional concerns in Stretton's work, has been foregrounded from a number of perspectives throughout my study. I have attempted gradually to demonstrate ways in which these elements might

be integrated in an understanding of the factors impinging on the impact of her work. As my examination of the figures of the child and the woman in Victorian culture has shown, aspects of melodrama were applied, for example, to texts of investigative journalism and temperance tracts; at the same time, the city, its inhabitants and their morals were the subject of actual stage melodrama, contributing to a coalescence of themes, representations and perceptions. Michael Booth (1973), discussing London Theatre, draws attention to the fact that 'London and the life of London became one of the dominant themes in the drama of the day' (212). The transferability of images of the city, already suggested in my discussion of newspaper articles, is underlined by the case of Dion Boucicault's 'The Streets of London' which played at the Princess's Theatre in London in 1864 (Booth, 1973, plate 62), and was staged originally as 'The Poor of New York', and then as 'The Poor of Liverpool', with the scenes being adapted (or 'localised', in Boucicault's own words) to the city where the play was given (Booth, 1965, 168). It is perhaps salient that Stretton records her attendance at a performance of this play - one of very few visits she made to the theatre.

Michael Booth observes in his study of English Melodrama that the genre represents 'a true social reflector of its times', portraying 'industrial unrest as well as urban squalor and the problems of drink' (Booth, 1965, 136). Here perhaps, we can attempt to link related threads directly or obliquely applicable to Stretton's work. Lance Salway (1971, 24) observes that her plots suggest that she could have written some 'stirring' stage melodramas, and certainly a modern reader of her texts has an impression that the stories invite adaptation for a visual medium. In addition, we have noted the proximity of her work, or of strands within her work, to mainstream contemporary secular 'popular' fiction. In Stretton's texts, both literary and extra-literary harnessing of melodramatic images converge; religious, moral and social visions coalesce; the undesirable and the alluring offer engagement from opposing perspectives. The city is the setting - a hell on earth. Michael Mason (1994, 139) comments on the 'demonisation' of the urban; hence we might assume that, as the personification of evil, the city can, in this instance, be seen as also the villain, with all the nuances invested in that image, the protagonists enacting the role of victim. The streets of London are 'like the meshes of a great net which had caught her in its web' (*The Storm of Life*, Ch. 18); the city has drawn all the family 'into its grasp' (*The Lord's Pursebearers*, Ch.1).

E. Ann Kaplan (1992), in her discussion of the political potential of melodrama, suggests that, despite the association of the genre's clear-cut moral message with conservatism, the integration of melodrama with a political message can serve to generate a more resistant text.²⁰ Whilst, as I have discussed, Stretton at times employs stereotypical descriptions, with some of her characters reflecting conventional types and exhibiting clear-cut moral stances, her simultaneous undermining of moral certainties functions to undercut these stereotypes, and to unsettle expectations and assumptions. The fact that Stretton's texts blend the popular appeal of melodrama with an insistent social concern means that her work is potentially politically engaged, and its juxtaposition of conservative and radical elements not only mirrors contemporary tensions, but serves at times to interrogate the status quo. Whereas M. Nancy Cutt deprecates Hesba Stretton's inclusion of melodramatic material, I would suggest that these diverse and roundabout associations with drama and spectacle serve to open the way for widespread engagement/political comment.

6.4 Images of Eden

As cultural critics such as Raymond Williams (1985) discuss, metaphors of Hell and Heaven intersect with discourses of town and country. Morally, physically and emotionally, rural order and tranquillity represent the antithesis of urban chaos and disorder, and it is interesting to examine Hesba Stretton's textual engagement with these oppositional discourses, both between and within texts. Some narratives are set entirely in the country; others specifically embody and encode physical and symbolic dualities. As we have glimpsed in relation to childhood, the country represents, and is sometimes explicitly referred to, as an 'Eden' of innocence and perfection, which is set in conventional opposition to the Hell (or evil knowledge) of the city.²¹ The image of the rural idyll recurs frequently. Sometimes more general pastoral images of idealistic cottage settings suggest simplicity/domesticity, harmony and regeneration; on occasions the contrast, and prevailing belief in the restorative (and remoralising) powers of the country for the disadvantaged of the town, are reflected, as, for example in Pilgrim Street (Ch.15); A Thorny Path (Ch.8); The Storm of Life (Ch.11). The sight of 'pallid children' and 'sallow women' gasping for a breath of air in the suffocating city streets makes one 'pant for green fields and fresh air and sea breezes' (The Soul of Honour,

Ch.20). The regenerative possibilities of the wider landscape, of the farms and open spaces offered by emigration destinations such as Canada (with their opportunities for economic improvement and self-determination) serve the same function.²² On occasions, biblical associations (which at the same time take on multiple cultural symbolism) are spelled out, and are seen to be in direct relationship to urban vice and squalor. The lark-filled meadows and 'cleansing' river are mistaken for, or seem 'almost like' heaven to the half-starved children fleeing a vice/death-ridden London lodging house: 'the sweet, fresh air and the gentle rippling of the river were washing away the evil influences' (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.13); Carola's country village is described as an Eden from which she will be driven out once her past is revealed (Ch.15), and in Bede's Charity, Margery, as narrator, finds the sounds and sights of the woodland from which she is exiled as dear to her as 'ever the garden of Eden was to Eve' (Ch.6).

Descriptions of the country are often sensual, reflecting Stretton's experience of the countryside, love of open spaces and abhorrence of containment and confined indoor spaces, which are liable to make you murderous (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.31). Margery 'thinks with longing' of the woods, the 'fresh country air that used to fan me', and of the 'deep lulling stillness of the night-time' (Bede's Charity, Ch.15). As discussed, woods and wild places in Stretton's texts embody the darkness and fear of abuse as well as the abundance and vitality of a free existence, and the security of homeland - aspects evoked, for example, in Cassy. Such multiple associations and contradictions are found in other texts, with wild places carrying undercurrents of evil and superstitious practices, whilst the same locations represent places of assignation, adventure or initiation, as in the enchanted chasm in The Highway of Sorrow or the 'wild tangles' and passages of the pit areas in No Place Like Home. The moors of Half Brothers, with their brooding atmosphere and proximity to nature, reminiscent of the moorland landscapes of Bronte's Wuthering Heights, suggest a life-supporting and alluring freedom, and at the same time a state of primitive, heathen savagery antithetical to conceptions of 'civilisation' (a theme I shall explore later in this chapter). The remote cave which is common to several of these Stretton texts represents a wild but womb-like hiding place.

As we have seen, conventional cultural polarities are at times undercut as well as reflected/reproduced. Davidoff (1995, 46) writes that during the nineteenth century, 'it was taken for granted that real communities could only be found in the English countryside. It was in rural England that the sense of community reigned and where the apparently automatic acceptance of the "natural order" of things ensured that the norms of deference and paternalism remained at their strongest'. In Carola the continuity and connectedness of the country community with its stable hierarchies, its 'masters and labourers', is presented as the traditional 'oak and branches' structure. Yet, this notion is undermined by exposure of the susceptibility of this order to disruption and change; the co-operative functioning of the community is threatened, and loyalty on the part of the 'masters' found to be subject to external forces. Furthermore, as suggested, town life may offer a sense of 'spirit', with 'chances and changes' absent in the 'unendurable solitude' of a 'stagnant' countryside (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.5; In the Hollow of His Hand, Ch.7). Thus, whilst the expansiveness of the country may sometimes be set in opposition to the containment of city life, the freedom of street life in particular has, paradoxically, affinities with rural 'wildness'/absence of restraint.

The idea of the outcast regions as a foreign country, or Dark Continent, serves, as Ellen Ross (1993, 14) confirms, to heighten the drama; it arguably contributes to the sense of 'fantasy' identifiable in ostensibly factual accounts (Mason, 1994, 134), inviting a concomitant suspension of disbelief. The journalist Sims's description of a dark continent within easy walking distance of the General Post Office (Sims, 1889/Keating (ed.), 1976) is well known, as is William Booth's later comparison between Darkest Africa and Darkest England. (Booth, 1890/Keating (ed.), 1976, 141). Together with the designation of social investigators as 'explorers', such imagery resonates with the language and precepts of both missionary and imperialist endeavours, which are themselves inextricably linked. The protagonist in Stretton's Half Brothers, a well-travelled business-man engaged in rather self-righteous philanthropic/missionary endeavours among the poor in London, 'enjoyed seeing the strange sights that were to be found in unexplored London as much as he had enjoyed the strange scenes in foreign lands' (Ch. 8). This viewpoint accords with the opinion of Sims that the English 'dark continent', with its 'wild races' and 'savage tribes' would prove 'as interesting as any of

those newly-explored lands which engage the attention of the Royal Geographical Society', and attract comparable public sympathy (Sims, 1889/Keating (ed.), 1976, 66). Such analogies were not new - Mayhew had regarded the outcast regions as akin to unknown or foreign territory - but they gradually took on heightened relevance. Richard Stein (1995) underlines the imperialist link and relates it to our 'capacity to subject and colonize others, to treat them *as Others*' (245), a theme particularly relevant to my overall project. Stein highlights the connection between Mayhew's poor and the natives of the empire. The poorest classes, as we have seen in exploring images of the child, are seen as primitives and savages, and, as Anna Davin (1990, 50) comments, 'scarcely human and highly sexual', a view often shared by members of the 'respectable' working class, and demonstrated by the terms in which the outcast are described and around which perceptions and subjectivities are shaped. Stedman Jones (1984, 285) observes that in the growing literature on Outcast London, the poor do not emerge as objects of compassion. As part of an imagery which constructs them as sub-human and monstrous, they are not only seen as 'wild' 'brutish' and 'barbarian', but, as Stretton often shows, their treatment and status as 'animals' is both internalised and resented. Davidoff (1995, 105) discusses the implications of the various discourses which construct certain groups as 'closer to nature than the rational adult middle-class man who dominated educated opinion', and the animal analogies applied to these groups.²³

Stretton underlines society's treatment of the disadvantaged as no better than animals, and their own allusions to this state. (It is significant that the campaigns for protective legislation for children highlight the fact that a Society for the protection of animals in fact existed before any such body was formed on behalf of children.) The accommodation of the outcast is described as 'styes' (Lost Gip); the 'swinelike' inhabitants of the 'filthy, crowded alleys' appear 'lower than the brutes', or like 'mischievous vermin' (The Lord's Pursebearers; Bede's Charity); their children 'swarm', and they are left to die or be buried 'like a dog' (A Thorny Path; Half Brothers, and other similar references). Stretton frequently uses analogies and metaphors which underline not only the bestial nature of the denizens of the underworld (for example, The Storm of Life, Ch.19, or the convicts in Siberia (In the Hollow of His Hand), but also the bestial 'otherness' of the opposite sex as perceived by her

characters, with men similarly as 'wild beasts', as noted in my examination of gender relations. Such terms recur throughout Stretton's work, from a variety of perspectives; society's assumptions and generalisations about the uncivilised or untamed nature of the foreigner, the unbeliever/unregenerate or the uneducated are foregrounded, as I will demonstrate in my subsequent discussion of criminality, and in my exploration of discourses of civilisation, savagery and otherness in relation to aspects of Half Brothers. Stretton's reproduction of terminology which acts to de-humanise, and in which the narratorial voice at times appears complicit, indicating a merging with authorial attitudes, is in tension with, and counterbalanced by, the humanity of her treatment of the outcast, and the individual voices and stories she gives to them.

At the same time as certain discourses construct the poor or outcast as alien, primitive, evil (or all these), different emphases present types such as the flower-seller or ragamuffin as decorative - part of the sentimentalisation of poverty and the portrayal of the urban scene as picturesque or exotic, and as curiosities of a different, less threatening kind.²⁴ We have seen from our study of the child that the harnessing of the picturesque and exotic may carry more complex intonations. The attraction of the outcast city and its inhabitants to the writer, artist or reader/viewer overlaps with the interest and concerns of the social investigator, the politician, the urban reformer, the evangelical missionary, and the educationalist, drawing on a range of similar metaphors, from different but intermingling and mutually dependent perspectives. It can be suggested that one motivation may mask another, and that it is open to both writer and reader to harness/engage with the inherent proximity to elements of 'otherness' for a variety of purposes.

The intersecting imagery under consideration can be seen to permeate the discourse of poverty from the early- to late-Victorian period, and therefore throughout the period during which Stretton was writing and campaigning, despite shifts in perception and consciousness. It seems pertinent to invoke Gertrude Himmelfarb's (1991) observations regarding changes in the framework in which poverty was conceived during the Victorian period. She notes the contrast between Mayhew's popularisation of the discourse, with its personal, colourful and dramatic portrayals, and Charles Booth's more analytical (yet perhaps more impersonal) approach, which aimed to differentiate between categories of poor. Mayhew's portrayal of poverty was confined in the main to

that of streetfolk. His tendency to represent them as a 'distinctive "race" with a distinctive moral physiognomy' (Himmelfarb, 1991, 11), gave rise to the perception that this more extreme and exotic poverty represented the condition of the working classes as a whole, and obscured the more mundane struggles of the majority of the working class. I would argue that Stretton's texts at various levels interact with the changing and intermingling perceptions, perhaps spanning, blending and interrogating the spectrum of attitudes/approaches. They encompass some of the dramatic and exotic elements, but move in the direction of practical social concern, and it is perhaps the juxtaposition of romanticism and realism, sentiment and reason, which is significant. Her texts frequently centre on conditions of extreme poverty and the stigma of pauperism, but also examine the wider struggles of the working classes, exposing the precariousness of their situation and the fine line which separates the various categories, not only in public perception, but in practical terms. Distinctions, and constructions of difference, within the poorer classes, are enacted and, at times, interrogated, as will be demonstrated as part of a focus on particular sections of outcast society.

Susan Casteras (1995) speaks of the 'mixture of Victorian middle-class compassion, anxiety, and selective awareness of the grim poverty that existed' (278). The underlying fears of the middle-classes are implicated in multiple, sometimes contradictory, responses. Their foundations are both psychological and socio-political; mechanisms of projection and control are interlinked, taking diverse forms and operating in different ways as Foucault has suggested. Messinger (1985, 110), discussing Victorian Manchester and the social novels, speaks of the need to domesticate our apprehension of that which is feared or unknown, and the function of literature to transform them into myth, thereby making them manageable. In Stretton's texts, as we have seen, the ideas of poverty as a moral defect, and as resulting from social deprivation, are interwoven. Lynda Nead (1988, 138), as noted, suggests that the directing of sympathy towards groups which are perceived as presenting a threat to the social order acts to diffuse the power of such groups. Recent currents of criticism, reflecting cynicism and suspicion of authority in all its guises and forms of agency foreground the subtleties of such mechanisms, but it is increasingly acknowledged that the situation is more complex, as Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 14) has suggested. The existence of a substantial religious element in many of Stretton's books, and the

discourses of morality and respectability embedded in her writing, suggests their role as a strand of social control. The effects of diffuse networks of control are inevitably implicated in Stretton's work, but, as this study has shown, social spheres and agencies generally assumed to be synonymous with regulation may function as radical or liberating. Discourses of religion, respectability, philanthropy and reform all incorporate different facets of fear, which include fear of the outcast, and fear for and on behalf of the outcast, both of which are reflected in Hesba Stretton's texts. Much has been made by critics of the sentimentality of representations of the poor by children's writers, but in considering Stretton's work, it may be more appropriate to invoke Himmelfarb's notion of compassion allied to reason and practicality, rather than in its sentimental mode, in which it is 'an exercise in moral indignation, in feeling good rather than doing good' (Himmelfarb, 5).²⁵

Stretton demonstrates the complexities/paradoxes of the practical outworking of compassion. As in The Lord's Pursebearers, where pathetic descriptions are not sentimental, but directed angrily at society, 'pity' may be seen as a 'curse', and indiscriminate charity misguided and evil, and evasive. As we have seen, and as subsequent sections will confirm, both social and individual responsibility is invoked in her work, and compassion for individuals tempered with an impatience in cases of idleness or lack of thrift. Yet, whether protagonists are victims of oppression and deprivation, chance circumstances, or their own folly, Stretton gives us an insight into the point of view not only of the privileged or the onlooker, but of the outcast, and extends our understanding of the forces at work in the individual and his circumstances.

In choosing poor, working-class and outcast protagonists/contexts, Hesba Stretton, like Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell, can be seen as playing a part in counteracting a general bias towards middle-class characters and settings in literature. Inevitably, despite her practical involvement and first-hand knowledge of deprived areas, Stretton, as discussed, must be classed as a middle-class observer. Her achievement in giving identity and voice to her protagonists, and in exposing the complexities of their situation, is bound up with the wider cultural matrix, and in tension with internalised class attitudes and perceptions, with resulting ambiguities/ambivalence. Stretton reflects stereotypes, yet individualises; she does not hide the wider social picture, but instead exposes unequal power relations and forms of exploitation, whilst at the same

time exploring the complexities of situations/interaction - factors which give depth to her work and ensure its historical, cultural and political significance.

6.5 Classes of outcast

We have seen that the preoccupations of the texts are both class-specific, and potentially offer cross-class engagement, in part through the displacement of issues such as gender relations, puberty and female restraint, violence and child abuse. Poorer class settings may function to give expression to middle class anxieties. Stretton's narratives also foreground class divisions, the instability of class barriers (and pervasive fear of this instability), the precariousness of economic status and the associated threat to social position. Gradations of poverty, intra-class hierarchies involving divisions between rough and respectable - and the ease with which one can become the other - are illustrated; prejudices which generate/interact with binary distinctions to perpetuate perceptions of 'otherness' are exposed.²⁶

As Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 122) discusses, categories of the poor and the working classes have tended, both at this and other periods, to be blurred or conflated; at the same time, dominant distinctions between different kinds of poor (often with moral overtones) have existed over time, and were operating during most of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Shifts in perception/classification occurred later in the century with Charles Booth's attempts to delineate classes of poor. Yet, as Benjamin Waugh (1873/1984, 169-70) confirms in relation to society's disregard to individualities, the 'distance-haze which hides away the personalities of the unhappy governed from the happy governor' masked 'the many fastidious distinctions' which marked poor from poor (Waugh, 1873/1984, 169-70). Perceived (and internalised) distinctions between different kinds of poor are exemplified in attitudes and occurrences which Stretton exposes in texts such as *Lost Gip*, where the young street child Sandy is befriended by the 'respectable' working-class philanthropist mother, and brought home to the (initially) bigoted father of the family. To the 'ragged and barefoot boy', the son of the family appears 'almost a gentleman' (Ch.4), and the perceived superiority of the 'scholar' over the unlearned street child is reflected. Sandy's status as 'other' and his allotted 'space' within the working-class community is signalled by his initial exclusion from the bright, homely kitchen, and his enclosure among the coffins in the dark shop (reminiscent of Oliver

Twist's experiences at Sowerberry's), while the father is consulted as to whether he is 'fit company for us' (Ch.8). Sandy's internalisation of such assumptions, his perception of his own inequality and difference, and his acceptance of his lot are pinpointed by Stretton. Despite his disappointment that, as a boy out of the streets, he is not considered a suitable companion, he is not in the least surprised, and has 'no idea of rebelling against Mr. Shafto's orders', knowing himself 'quite unfit for such a place, and such friends' (Ch.10).²⁸ In the process of integration, he graduates to a place on the kitchen hearth, 'with an old mattress and a brown moth-eaten velvet pall out of the shop' (Ch.8), and finally literally steps into the clothes which symbolise respectability and place, upon the death of the crippled son of the family. This integration and 'replacement' is made possible through a combination of his own spiritual and moral progress, and a recognition of unjust and hypocritical attitudes, in varying degrees, by the family.

The complexity and ambivalence of attitudes within and between classes is exemplified in Stretton's early text Enoch Roden's Training; in this narrative, aspirations towards a socialist utopia are voiced, and notions of equality and the integration of classes idealised and in part enacted.²⁹ At the same time, Victorian perceptions of the stabilising influence of the more respectable classes on the 'natural' baseness of the poor are reflected. The cottages of the long and narrow court of Hill's Close are 'only fitted to be the dwellings of quite poor people', but their proximity to the homes of the well-to-do tradesmen ensures that the inhabitants 'maintain among themselves a certain courtesy and soberness of manner, very much superior to the rough savageness of the ignorant and beggarly population of the low parts' (Ch.1). The strictures imposed by class difference in terms of behaviour, and the importance invested in the idea of 'respectability', are suggested in the preferential treatment deemed necessary, and the concern/self-doubt expressed, following the integration of the orphaned daughter of one of the once better-off masters by the poorer family (such concerns, of course, also reflecting gender assumptions). '[Y]ou must be very careful of your manners. Miss Lucy could not bear any rudeness or roughness ... there's such lots of little things to remember, that I'm half afraid of forgetting myself before Miss Lucy ... but it won't do us any harm to learn to behave ourselves like gentlefolk' (Ch.6). Questions of pride and the importance of appearances ('none of them liked the neighbours to see their extreme

poverty', Ch.8) are entangled in this text, as in numerous other Stretton narratives,³⁰ with an awareness of the precariousness of survival (allied to the insecurity of the work situation). These issues are, in turn, bound up with the fear of pauperism and the spectre (and reality) of the workhouse, which figure so prominently in Victorian texts.³¹

We have noted the prominence of the East End in the portrayal of poverty and degradation. As cultural critics such as Raymond Williams (1985, 221) confirm, the East increasingly symbolised the predominant image of darkness and poverty which became central in literature and social thought. We have seen that the 'dark den' of East London, with its fog and gloom, in Stretton's The Lord's Pursebearers and other texts, recalls the London of Dickens; her portrayals of the East End frequently accord with Beatrice Potter's (i.e. Webb's) description of a 'vortex' (Samuel, 1998, 307) which sucks people in and down. This area of the city, as Brian Harrison (1973, 180) shows, was identified with everything feared by the well-to-do, and can be seen as the embodiment of racial and class otherness.³² Such concepts of difference are, in part, constructed and enacted through discourses which invoke the polarities of East and West within the city.

In Bede's Charity (1872), the symbolism of such locational extremes is foregrounded; the implications of, and anxieties about, increasing fluidity of class boundaries is enacted. Stretton examines different kinds of poverty, and explores issues of social mobility, class barriers and prejudices. She considers the effects of a desire for social advancement (which is presented as both desirable and to be treated with caution because of the emotional and moral pitfalls, including social blindness, inherent in elevated lifestyles). The possibilities and complexities of escaping from a background of extreme poverty are explored through the progress, setbacks and responses of the young urchin, Cor; also pivotal are the consequences of sudden decline in economic status - from modest living to penury - with its concomitant loss of respectability as well as material struggle for survival. The text highlights the gulf - and sometimes the fine line - which exists between the inhabitants of the 'two countries' or two sides of London. After living among the poor people, Margery's visit to the grand and fashionable parts of London is like 'going into a foreign country, and seeing foreign ways', with a 'sea deeper than the ocean' rolling between the wealthy and the unknown poor regions of London. (Bede's Charity Ch.18).³³ Differences of perspective are

acknowledged (and experienced by the protagonist): the idea of London as a great City with streets of gold and many mansions is the prevailing image for the inhabitant of one district - an image unsustainable for the visitor to the crowded alleys 'within a stone's throw of it'. Using biblical parallels, Stretton examines the attitudes which reflect social snobbery and fears of class contamination, and which seek to protect the one side from being exposed even to the sight of the other, a situation which echoes Engels' observations in relation to Manchester, regarding the barring of the working classes from the 'tender susceptibilities of the eyes and nerves of the middle classes' (Engels, quoted in Nord, 1997, 147). For some, poverty and squalor are sights which 'they are too refined and sensitive to look upon', and which inspire 'unutterable loathing and horror' (David Lloyd's Last Will (1869, Vol.1, Ch.5). In Stretton's The Lord's Pursebearers, the emaciated young Fidge, hired for begging purposes, is 'a object, too harrowin' for the West End' (Ch.2). One world remains stubbornly blind/indifferent to the plight of the other, a situation which Stretton exposes and, through her writing, seeks to rectify. In Bede's Charity she also examines concepts of breeding or gentility (and their relationship to money), as well as the possible consequences of stepping out of one's station. The differences and changes of perspective - and of perceived identity - which apply according to economic position are examined through the protagonist's changing circumstances, and the complexity of attitudes exposed. The role of bodily appearance in defining status and the implications for subjectivity are underlined.

The impoverished Margery of Bede's Charity is effectively excluded from her successful brother's world; he conceals from her his whereabouts, and subsequently hides her from his acquaintances when she appears on his doorstep. In seeking him out, she has transgressed that boundary - social and physical - which he, as male professional, has successfully crossed by means of emigration, business success and, ironically, an education which Margery - prompted by her aspirations for him - has encouraged. As a bodily reminder of the less prosperous, though respectable, background they share, and the additional fall in caste she now represents, she is denied by him and treated with scorn by his servants. When, unrecognised, she comes into contact with her own niece, the child is deterred from touching her, the nurse '[drawing] her back sharply' when she raises her face to be kissed (Ch.15). However, the straightforwardness of the child figure is utilised to examine the question which runs

through the text: 'what is it that makes a woman a lady?' (Ch.20) - an interrogation also extended throughout the narrative to the concept of a 'gentleman'. At one point, the effects on subjectivity of an existence of poverty, and the failure of society to recognise needs and rights, are underlined by Stretton's narrative strategy. The denial of identity and disintegration of self implied by the elderly Margery's exclusion and powerlessness is highlighted by the fact that at her lowest point - when she is starving, homeless, lost and suffering from loss of memory - the text moves from her first person narrative to narration, for part of the text, by another party, a device which serves to underline the central character's effacement from society and the relegation of the poor to the status of object. Her disorientation also invites engagement with a wider sense of confusion and chaos associated with urban life. At the same time, Stretton endows the protagonist of Bede's Charity with a comprehension of the reasons why she is not accepted in the world in which her brother now lives, just as in Carola, the protagonist understands why Phillip could not take a wife 'out of such a place' (Carola, Ch.30). In these texts it is made clear, although not fully condoned, that associations with vice and degradation (even when the individual is morally beyond reproach) infect class position, as in the judgement from the perspective of Carola's potential mother-in-law that class and a good (unstained) name go hand in hand (Ch.17).

An additional strand of social comment in Bede's Charity (on the surface in a lighter vein), is the portrayal of Margery's acquaintance, Mrs. Moss, who has known more affluent times, and constantly bemoans the loss of her genteel position, a stance which forecloses any possibility of living in the present and adapting to reduced circumstances. Her conversation reflects her disdain of the 'common people', and she deplores the idea of her daughter going into service ('nobody belonging to me has ever been a servant'- Ch.22), or marrying beneath her (a situation again considered in Carola, where Philip 'must look higher' - Ch.11). Marrying out of one's station, and the problem of 'unequal yoking' in terms of class as well as religious belief, recur in Stretton's diaries and texts, as does her awareness of the difference which even a modest economic security or independence makes to one's life. The narrative of Bede's Charity, reflecting a variety of stances and perspectives on social superiority/inferiority, as well as social progression, ultimately works to mediate differences and effect reconciliation. At the same time as it exposes discourses of the *outcast body* (individual

and corporate), it points out deficiencies in the *wider social body*, foregrounding hypocrisy and lack of compassion, the absurdities of official systems, and failure on the part of authorities to address social problems and make provision. Stretton's awareness of actual/statistical inadequacies is reflected, and pressing social situations again authoritatively woven into the narrative. We are presented with the information, for example, that a street refuge with a capacity of seven hundred is full by seven o'clock during the winter (Ch.26). Similarly, the narrator of David Lloyd's Last Will (Vol.1, Ch.24) advises us that in the winter of 1862, fourteen thousand pounds a week is needed to supply bare necessities to the starving population of Manchester.

6.6 The City as a criminal world

The equation, both perceived and actual, of poverty with criminality, means that the context/location of many of Stretton's texts ensures an inherent proximity to a criminal environment. As Judith Walkowitz, (1992, 26) observes, 'startling revelations of "Outcast London" familiarized middle-class readers with the sordid and depressing living conditions of the poor'; in the later decades of the century, as in the 1840s, they were reminded of 'the dangerous social proximity between vast numbers of casual laborers and a professional criminal class'. In his 'Bitter Cry', Andrew Mearns describes the 'low parts' of London, where 'entire courts are filled with thieves, prostitutes and liberated convicts' (Mearns, 1883/Keating (ed.), 1976, 98).

In discussing an increasing openness to voicing the 'unmentionable', Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 62) discusses the problem faced by women in alluding to the unspeakable. From the earliest texts, Stretton unflinchingly confronts diverse subjects generally deemed unsuitable for women's pens, although at times her approach may be somewhat oblique. As Cutt (1979, 137) notes, Hesba Stretton did not shy away from issues such as crime.³⁴ It is clear that, like Dickens, Stretton was able to see the 'dregs' of society as a source of valuable material, and to draw her characters from what Dickens described as 'the most criminal and degraded in London's population' (Preface to Oliver Twist, 1838/1966, 33). A number of Stretton's texts deal directly with a criminal environment, although again protagonists are sometimes slightly removed, suggesting a reluctance to cast her lot in wholly with the perspective of the criminal element. In some instances, forms of distancing imply a 'class distinction' based on

innate goodness or badness, although Stretton is undeniably concerned with the association between material circumstances and crime. The young (blue-eyed and blond-haired) Tom of Pilgrim Street appears 'sweet and innocent' compared with the 'aged and vicious aspect' of most of his street companions (Ch.1). David (In Prison and Out) is not 'born' to a career of crime; there has 'always been a vital difference between him and them' (Ch.22). Some of Stretton's protagonists are on the edge of the criminal world; others, like Tom and David, or Rachel in The Storm of Life, are drawn into it (like Dickens's Oliver), or perceived as part of it, their guilt often inferred. In the case of Carola, the protagonist has communed with criminals ('of the lowest and most degraded type') and is unwittingly a witness to a criminal act; 'springing' from such a class, she takes on the 'taint' of the criminal world. Certain of Stretton's representations of the 'criminal' are clearly intended as more negative than others, with oppositions between those who are thoroughly bad, and those who are inherently good, but there are ways in which even these polarisations are complicated.

On occasions, for example, the 'villain' of the piece is used as a mouthpiece for critique of the social order, and an exposure of forms of social control. Stretton's representation of the criminal husband in The Storm of Life is clearly condemnatory, revealing his exploitation of wife and daughter, and, as evangelical and moral messenger, Stretton never condones criminal behaviour. However, I would suggest that some of this character's assertions carry the weight of authorial questioning of society's role, highlighting the effects of inequality and causes of resentment and bitterness, and complicating simplistic moralising.³⁵ They raise moral questions which are both historically specific and to some degree transhistorical. In The Storm of Life, the husband declares his refusal to starve, while folks 'roll in money' (Ch.14); rich people 'idle' while folks are 'clemming' to death (Ch.12), and tread on the poor 'like their slaves'. What 'harm', therefore, he reasons, can there be in robbing them? (Ch.12).³⁶ The notion of religion as social control is given expression, with the gospel perceived as an 'old woman's tale' (Ch.12), perpetuated in order to keep the masses in their place by 'rich folks' who would 'have us poor folks believe, to keep us down'.³⁷ This is a perception frequently invited by the sermons of the time, as Jenifer Hart (1977) discusses in relation to religion and social control. The general message of sermons at this time was that the social structure was natural, inevitable and ordained by God. As

such, distinctions of rich and poor were, despite the idea of the equality of all in the sight of God, 'insuperable peculiarities of the human race' (Hart, 109), and poverty a 'necessary element in the social life of a nation' (113). Economic or social elevation, although increasingly seen as tolerable, was to be limited, and the doctrine of resignation and heavenly rewards was often stressed. It is difficult to know whether the scepticism shown by Stretton's criminal is a true reflection of attitudes which she knew to be expressed by the dispossessed or disenfranchised (who, moreover, were less likely to attend Church to hear such sermons). Such representations may stem from Stretton's middle-class recognition, fed by her liberal and often critical 'sermon-tasting', of the unjust and manipulatory appropriation of religious themes for purposes of social regulation/legitimation of material inequalities, and a consequent attribution of perceptions.

Set against Stretton's vision of the deviant as, in certain instances, deserving of understanding, or susceptible to rehabilitation, is the image in her texts of a 'criminal type'. Such representations, evoking the theories of Lombroso, engage with debates surrounding the notion of an innate, contagious or irremediable, tendency towards criminality, and suggest ambivalence about the notion of an inbred capacity for vice. Stretton insists that environment brutalises, but individual and social causation are sometimes blurred. These narratives illustrate the role of language and discourse in the construction of attitudes towards deviance. Female criminals, in particular, are seen to violate not only the laws of society, but also those of nature, to the extent that their immersion in vice means they can no longer be regarded as women. They appear 'degraded to the deepest corruption, not worthy of the name of women' (In The Hollow of His Hand, Ch.18), a perception which evokes Dickens's much earlier description (Oliver Twist, 1838/1966, 237) of women 'with every mark and stamp of their sex utterly beaten out'. In the 'low dens' the men are regarded as 'a disgrace to manhood', but women have 'lost all womanhood' (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.14).

6.7 The young criminal

A focus on criminality invites discussion of a particular figure of concern - one which has been broached in relation to my focus on the child - namely, that of the juvenile delinquent. This is an area which clearly crosses the boundaries of child and adult

preoccupations, and might fittingly have been explored under the earlier section on childhood. However, it also has a natural place in the discussion of the criminal world, and at the same time has clear links with the overlapping discourses and concerns under discussion in this section.

As historians such as Geoffrey Pearson (1983) and Hugh Cunningham (1991) have noted, increasing anxiety about juvenile crime was bound up with wider fears of unrest; juvenile lawlessness was seen as arising from the lowest classes, and as foreshadowing the possibility of insurrection among those classes (Pearson, 159). In turn, as we have seen, these attitudes were bound up with changes in ideas regarding the nature of childhood, with an increased sense of the dependence and vulnerability of the child now being applied to the lower as well the upper/middle classes. Hugh Cunningham (1991, 107) refers to the burgeoning literature on juvenile delinquency from the 1840s onwards, and discusses the overlapping discourses which surround, in particular, the representation of street children in the mid-Victorian period.³⁸

In its preoccupation with the children of the streets, Stretton's writing can be seen to reflect, and expose, prevailing attitudes and perceptions with regard to their idleness and propensity to crime, as well as the material circumstances of their involvement in the criminal world. Cunningham (1991, 110-11), notes that Mayhew, whilst supposedly concentrating on street-sellers, frequently switches to discussion of young criminals as though the two were synonymous. Mayhew himself speaks of the 'hardening' consequences of a street career, and a selfishness resulting from the hard struggles of life; at the same time, this class '... keep up a constant current of scheming and excitement' (Mayhew 1861-2/1985, 161; 177). Stretton, as narrator, comments on the fact that the children of the poor are 'free to stay away from their miserable homes as long as they will' (*Bede's Charity*, Ch.14). As her associate, Benjamin Waugh (1873), makes clear, the child of the streets is the antithesis of the domesticated child; the importance of home and the mother figure are central to his arguments, as they are to those of Stretton herself.³⁹

In discussing the street child, we have noted this perceived inevitability of involvement in crime. Stretton shows that the 'common boy of the streets' is assumed to be a criminal. Like Tony in *Alone in London* (Ch. 10), he is, in the eyes of the world, 'no

doubt a thief and pickpocket', or like Sandy in Lost Gip (Ch.9), 'a rogue and a thief, *no doubt*' (my italics), and the actual development of one into the other, and the elision of the two in public perception is significant in Stretton's narratives.⁴⁰ As Cunningham (1991, 122) points out, juvenile delinquency was defined principally as a male problem; in numerous Stretton texts, the young protagonists who brush with the law or the judicial system, or who become deeply enmeshed in the world of crime and prison, are adolescent boys.⁴¹ Although a number of her narratives revolve around the criminal activities of street-dwellers or of the very poor, certain texts express a concern which might be seen to cross class categories; engagement is perhaps invited by instances such as the country mother who voices her anxiety regarding a son about to start work - about to step into the 'perils' of boyhood (No Place Like Home (1881, Ch.3). Reflecting notions of criminality as a disease, the adolescent is perceived as susceptible to influences from various sources. In their Report for 1879, the Committee of the Religious Tract Society expressed concern that 'juvenile crime was being largely stimulated by the pernicious literature circulated among our lads' (Green, 1899, 127). Moreover, to boys from less impoverished backgrounds, the street ruffian, with his adult freedoms and lack of restraint, could, as Cunningham (1991, 110) agrees, acquire the status of hero. However, as will become clear, the very different responses of society and of the legal system to misdemeanours by the offspring of the middle-classes are highlighted in Stretton's themes.

Issues, perceptions and prejudices which apply to the criminal world in general, or the figures/sections of society likely to be elided with this category, apply also to the young 'delinquent'. These concern relationships with authority, and issues of control and surveillance. Benjamin Waugh, writing in 1873 on juvenile justice, speaks of the figure of the official 'dominat[ing]' the poor-boy world (29), and the police as the 'autocrat[s] of the street' (37); to 'keep alive, and keep clear of the police is the chief aim of [the street-urchin's] day-to-day life' (141). Stretton alludes to the deeply rooted 'instinct of the City Arab to escape from a policeman' (Pilgrim Street, Ch.9), and exposes a predetermined sense of destiny in her young protagonists, who are constantly hounded and come to see jail as an inevitable fate at some point.

The street-children, Mayhew asserts, were 'haters of the police and of most constituted authorities' (Mayhew, 1861-2/Neuberg (ed.), 1985, 177). In the eyes of Stretton's

protagonists, the police are often regarded as ‘natural enemies’ (Lost Gip, Ch.6; Jessica’s First Prayer, Ch.3).⁴² In turn, figures of authority are exposed as making judgements and generalisations based on preconceptions about the children of the streets, who are labelled ‘born and bred liars and thieves’ (Pilgrim Street, Ch. 2); ‘*this sort*’ (my italics) are ‘slippery as eels’ (Lost Gip, Ch.7). The inhabitants of the poor areas are shown to be constantly under the searchlight of authority; protagonists such as Cassy are forced to creep into dark recesses ‘out of the beat of the too busy policeman’ (Ch.4), a situation which echoes Mayhew’s finding (485) that the police ‘have control over the low people and places in the East-end’. Ubiquitous surveillance is made doubly clear by the recurring motifs in the illustrations which support Stretton’s exposure of power relations, with cowering figures subjected to the piercing beam of torchlight, as in Pilgrim Street (Ch.12), The Storm of Life (Ch.7), The King’s Servants (Part 3, Ch.7), and with ‘no disobedience to a policeman’s order’ contemplated (Pilgrim Street, Ch.4).⁴³ The ultimate powerlessness of the juvenile accused, who is rarely given a voice or the opportunity to justify himself, is brought into sharp focus; no-one doubts the statement of the police, and no time is allowed to look into the case (In Prison and Out, Ch. 2). Limited resistance to authority may be offered, as we have seen, by the direct actions or dialogue of the protagonist, but often characters remain passive, with resistance undertaken by Stretton on their behalf through the critique implicit in the narrative.

As discussed by Pearson (1983), from mid-nineteenth century onwards the focus of delinquency debates and philanthropic efforts, reflecting a complexity of motives, shifted towards a more humanitarian and reformative emphasis, as evidenced by the concerns of ‘child-savers’ such as Shaftesbury, Davenport Hill and Carpenter. Particularly relevant is the increasingly high profile accorded as the Victorian era progressed to the idea of juvenile justice as a separate area within the judicial system, and to the creation of distinct practices. Alternative methods were needed in relation to punishing/dealing with the needs of the young offender, and by mid-century this was reflected in legislation such as the Youthful Offenders’ Act of 1854. Changes were bound up with religious influences, liberal thought, and developments in education and in sociological studies, reflecting progressive ideas (and suggesting, from a Foucauldian perspective, alternative mechanisms of social control).⁴⁴ As Pearson (182) observes, the

‘reformation of the rising generation was arguably the only means by which to maintain effective control over a fractious people’, with the education of the young as a means of preventing the working-class from ‘reproducing itself in its present condition’.⁴⁵ Social and legal change, in Stretton’s narratives, go hand in hand with the need to ‘touch the heart’ and with the idea of the ‘softening power of love’ as put forward by earlier reformers such as Mary Carpenter (quoted in Pearson, 180). As narratives such as Pilgrim Street make clear, ‘we cannot take these lads out of the streets, but we can try to make them very different from what they are’ (Ch.3). In Stretton’s themes, the need to *experience* the softening power of love extends to figures of authority such as policemen and magistrates (it was unheard of to speak of feeling any affection for ‘thievish lads who were the daily plague of his life’ - Pilgrim Street, Ch. 3).

At the conclusion of In Prison and Out, Stretton makes reference to, and advocates the reading of, Benjamin Waugh’s text entitled The Gaol Cradle: Who Rocks It?, an analysis of the causes and problems of juvenile crime, which caused an uproar when it was published in 1873. My examination of this text reveals the extent of their overlapping concerns and attitudes. Waugh’s study makes explicit a number of the issues which were the subject of contemporary debate in relation to delinquency; it deals with definitions and causes of juvenile crime, and its relationship to poverty, centring on preventative strategies and the need for reform in the treatment and punishment of juvenile offenders - concerns, ideas and arguments which continue to have a strong resonance today.

Stretton acknowledges that a number of the incidents around which In Prison and Out revolves are based on factual instances, and the foundation for individual themes is easily recognisable from the examples Benjamin Waugh cites. Whereas Waugh, like Barnardo, includes anecdotes to illustrate his polemic, Stretton weaves the facts into her ‘thread of fiction’ (the subtitle, sometimes cited as the main title, is ‘Facts on a Thread of Fiction’) to achieve a narrative which draws the reader in to the circumstances of the individual and betrays her own sense of urgency in relation to social change. Although In Prison and Out is the text most directly linked to Waugh’s ideas, her earlier work testifies to her longstanding belief in the arguments he puts forward, and certain allied themes recur throughout her later writing.

In Prison and Out rehearses many of the central debates surrounding juvenile justice. The issues of labelling/branding and internalisation which concern Waugh and other reformers of juvenile justice (having 'call[ed] him a dog', the system 'makes him a dog' - Waugh, 9) surface in Hesba Stretton's work. The downward spiral of a life based on criminal activity is foregrounded, as are the problems of contamination and recidivism, with society's negative responses clearly condemned. David (In Prison and Out) is 'driven' by his circumstances to mix with professional criminals like Blackett, and inevitably grows to like crime (Ch.17). The attraction of the criminal world may be in terms of a sense of inclusion offered by the apparent care and interest provided by the criminal fraternity and seen to be lacking in society in general - a theme which recalls the plight of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The criminal Blackett 'takes care' of David, providing him with food and shelter, but teaching him the lessons of the underworld (Ch.17). Like Dickens, Stretton points to the effects of poverty and deprivation on moral choices, and shows that those who are hungry and motherless are more likely to be drawn in to the criminal environment. The solidarity of the subculture is observed; at the same time their self-interest is noted - there is 'no honour among thieves' (Alone in London, Ch.6). The stigma which adheres to the young ex-prisoner or 'gaol-bird' ('lads never got over the shameful fact ... it clung to them for life' - A Man of His Word, 1878, Ch.6), together with society's unwillingness to give him a chance, are clearly spelled out, with Stretton's narrative echoing Waugh's arguments and examples.

Stretton's indignation at society's lack of provision for young working-class boys, in the form of education or training for employment, is an insistent theme; no-one 'take[s] the trouble' to find work for young David (In Prison and Out, Ch. 2), a criticism which reflects the Victorian belief in idleness as the source of all ills, but also pinpoints social inadequacies. The training denied David as a free adolescent is given to him in prison, but serves no purpose outside when the stigma of his prison record deprives him of a position. Prison is seen as a training ground for crime ('if you send him to gaol, he'll grow up a thief' - In Prison and Out, Ch.12). Five years later David has 'developed skill enough to transgress the laws and yet evade the penalty', and has joined the 'brotherhood of thieves', no longer to be classed among the juvenile criminals (Chs.20 and 22). Stretton demonstrates the effectiveness of the prison training ship; she allows

the son of the criminal to be reformed, and ultimately to marry the protagonist's sister. Deprived of such rehabilitative treatment, David, however, dies in prison.

Stretton - like Waugh and Mayhew - demonstrates an awareness of the fact that a different morality operates in an environment of poverty. As we have seen in other contexts under discussion, the circumstances which lead to crime are explored in her work, as they are in Waugh's analysis, and a degree of justification is permitted. The poor are 'pinned down to suffering and crime' (In Prison and Out, Ch.22); stealing, as Stretton frequently acknowledges, becomes necessary in order to supplement the income from street selling. The pragmatism of the street-wise is highlighted, and sentimentalised moral aspirations set in the context of material need, as in the case of Tony, who acknowledges God's 'provision' of his crossing broom, but admits that if his efforts to stay out of prison are unsuccessful, he 'had better make a business' of thieving and pickpocketing (Alone in London, Ch.11). The injustice of a law which does not take into account the circumstances of the crime is underlined. David begs in order to keep his mother from starving;⁴⁶ he fights to uphold her rights and to save her good name - behaviour which, as Waugh concurs, might be seen as heroic in a different class context.

Both Stretton and Waugh highlight, and condemn, the varying responses of society and of those executing justice, according to the class background of the accused. The misdemeanours for which the boy of the streets is punished, and cast into 'a gulf from which there was no clear escape in this life' (In Prison and Out, Ch.14) are compared by both to the pranks of middle or upper-class boys, or, indeed, the trespasses committed daily by every schoolboy. The theft of eggs for which Ishmael in No Place Like Home (1881) is imprisoned is 'naught but a lad's trick, ... such as anyone 'ud do' (Ch.3). In the text In Prison and Out, in which the polemic is throughout overtly entwined with the narrative, Stretton directly invokes Tom Brown's Schooldays, a 'favourite with all the upper and middle classes of Great Britain', and her character alludes to 'the scrapes those boys got into, and out of! The crimes against English Law they committed!' (In Prison and Out, Ch.14). Stretton suggests that, had the same justice been meted to offenders from these classes, many a present-day gentleman would have been a 'greyhaired convict in penal servitude' (Ch.14), an assertion which chimes with Waugh's sentiments.

In a similar examination of class distinctions, the magistrate in Stretton's A Man of His Word is forced to think through his attitudes when faced with the moral dilemma of whether to treat his own grandson in the same manner as that in which he has readily dealt with other young offenders, and sees for the first time the incongruity of incarcerating frightened young urchins or poverty-stricken poachers in the same 'crib' as the 'blackest criminals' (Ch.5). Allied to such discrepancies is the important issue of the boundary between adult and child, with the shifting interpretations of that boundary closely related to class, as we have seen to be crucial in relation to constructions of childhood. Stretton highlights the injustice of such distinctions: 'He was but a boy still. In many homes he would have been reckoned among the children, and his faults of temper would have been passed over, or leniently dealt with' (In Prison and Out, Ch.16) - a situation repeated in No Place Like Home (Ch.6), where Ishmael, who 'in happier homes' would still be considered a child, faces eviction by his drunken father and a precarious life on the streets after release from prison.

In line with contemporary debates, Stretton exposes the inadequacies of existing social/legal systems and forms of punishment, exploring questions of provision and the attribution of blame. She discusses the fact that severity does not work, and stresses that prison sentences are ineffective and counterproductive: 'we sent him once and again to gaol as the fitting penalty for childish faults' (In Prison and Out, Ch.22).⁴⁷ Communal responsibility is not evaded: in answer to the question, 'Who Rocks the [Gaol] Cradle?', Stretton suggests, in her postscript to the reader, that it is 'You and I'.

6.8 Other kinds of alterity: 'Earth's Eternal Outcasts'

Another city figure who surfaces in Stretton's texts is that of the East End Jew - part of a sizeable community by the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ In his situation as foreign, of an alien religion, and often a member of the struggling poor, such a figure might be seen as doubly or triply marginalised. Certainly, cultural perceptions and representations of the Jew embodied the contradictions inherent in a designation of alterity, with the character both exoticised and despised, respected for particular qualities or viewed with caution and suspicion.⁴⁹

Judith Walkowitz (1992, 35) discusses the biological racism which informed Charles Booth's depictions of both the indigenous labouring poor and also the Jews. Walkowitz notes the inconsistencies and paradoxes which surfaced in relation to Booth's analysis of the Jews, contradictions which presented a challenge to his attempts at categorisation and demarcation; as she observes in respect of his accounts, 'like other "urban primitives", Jews bore the physical stigmata of racial Otherness'. At the same time, they failed to fit the pattern of degradation associated with such otherness, emerging as 'a private, home-centered people not given to street brawls, wife-beating, or child neglect' (Walkowitz, 36).

It is therefore interesting to consider the representation of the Jew as surrogate parent and moral guardian in Stretton's Carola (1884). Stretton's portrait of an individual Jew (despite the stereotypical name of Matthias Levi which she affords him) shows him to be very different from the image handed down in the figure of the corrupted and corrupting influence of Fagin (labelled generically as 'the Jew') of Dickens's Oliver Twist. Many of the preconceptions and prejudices surrounding the Jews are reflected in Booth's survey, but Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991) records contemporary recognition of perceived Jewish virtues, noting their sobriety and the family values associated with them. Mayhew (1861-2/Neuburg (ed.), 1985, 196) had observed that marriage tended to be the rule for street Jews; later, Beatrice Potter, in her investigation - and somewhat idealised account - recorded the Jewish prescription of obedience to parents, devotion to children and respect for women, as well as their high regard for chastity - themes relevant to Stretton's preoccupations. Potter found the Jewish community to be law-abiding and industrious, with a desire for self-betterment; she was impressed by their intellectual superiority, self-discipline and 'highly developed personal and communal morality' which embraced structures of communal charity as well as self-reliance (Himmelfarb, 1991, 140-143). These are characteristics which Hesba Stretton, crossing the barriers of religion, culture, gender and generation, and at the same time subverting more negative perceptions of a Jewish 'type', foregrounds in her representation of the old man who undertakes Carola's physical, financial and moral upbringing amidst the drunken depravity of the East End. As suggested in my discussion of Carola's maturation, the relationship between them, despite its locational specifics, embodies all the complexities of attachment and separation implicit in the relationship between

parent and adolescent, thereby engaging with cross-class issues.⁵⁰ It also incorporates the pathetic effects of melodrama suggested by Michael Booth (1965), namely an 'aged parent' sorrowing for 'the misery of erring daughter' (30).

Stretton charts the development and strength of, as well as the challenges to, the bond between the protagonists. Undercutting perceptions of 'the Jew' as self-seeking (people are 'accustomed to think of all Jews as cunning and avaricious'- Ch.5), she shows Matthias to be protective of Carola's financial interests for the sake of her well-being rather than for his own gain. Stretton demonstrates the value of his religious tradition and the moral superiority of the old man in relation to his fellow inhabitants, with whom he is unpopular 'chiefly because he [is] a Jew' (Ch.20); she utilises the positive qualities of this self-appointed guardian to point up the deficiencies and moral shortcomings of the population of the East End at large. Although perceived as so-called Christians from the Jewish perspective, the inhabitants of the East End are clearly not regarded as such from Hesba Stretton's standpoint. However, the effect of this narrative is not merely to condemn. Stretton juxtaposes the perspectives of Jew and non-Jew, highlighting the errors/misperceptions which develop between people of different religions and communities (as she does in relation to different branches of Christianity in her narratives of the Stundists, and to Catholics and Protestants in other texts, where the label 'heretic' is seen to be applied by both sides).

Investigators such as Beatrice Potter noted, and appreciated, the tenacity with which Jews clung to their 'majestic religion', and their resistance to missionary attempts (Himmelfarb, 1991, 140). As David Englander (1989, 561) observes, East End clergy displayed concern about the negative influence of the Jews in an already difficult spiritual environment. Clearly, Stretton does ultimately perceive the conversion of Matthias as part of a missionary endeavour which includes the conversion of non-Christians of all backgrounds. After using his faith as a stepping-stone to Carola's own spiritual maturation (perhaps echoing J.R. Seeley's suggestion in *Ecce Homo* (1865), which Stretton records purchasing, of the Jew as midway between the heathen and the Christian), the narrative resolution provides for his assimilation into the community of believers. Arguably, however, her positive portrayal of Matthias, her appreciation of his religion and recognition of aspects of commonality, constitute an approach which intervenes and mediates in contemporary discourses of alterity, at the same time

interrogating the practices through which misrepresentations occur, mythologies take shape and misunderstandings and prejudices are perpetuated.⁵¹

George K. Behlmer (1985, 242) refers to the shared status as 'earth's eternal outcasts' of the Jew and that other socially peripheral figure, the gypsy - a character who features in several of Stretton's texts, and recurs as a wider Victorian social and literary trope. 'If English literature of the nineteenth century contains within it a constant, ubiquitous marker of otherness ...,' observes Deborah Epstein Nord (1998, 189), 'it is the gypsy'. The gypsy signified 'social marginality, nomadism, alienation, and lawlessness', and unlike the partially assimilated Jew, 'hovered on the outskirts of the English world' (189). Like that of other marginalised figures around which Stretton's narratives revolve, the cultural image of the gypsy as wild, dangerous, and belonging to a separate race, embodies contradictions and evokes ambivalent responses; it embraces romanticised concepts of 'difference' in which the picturesque, the exotic, the unconventional and the undesirable coalesce, engendering fear and fascination. As Behlmer (1985, 234) notes, the label 'Gypsy' was applied loosely; it covered various classes of itinerant worker as well as types of vagrant - members of the 'wandering tribes' described by Henry Mayhew. The discourses which constructed the town-dweller as part of the 'dregs' or 'refuse', and relegated him to the status of animal, were also frequently applied to the gypsy.

As we have seen, Stretton's narratives often centre on the inhabitants of the streets or poor areas. The urban masses, were, of course, periodically swelled by an influx of the itinerant population, many of whom worked on the land during summer months and entered the city during the winter. The influence of this intermingling can be observed in Lost Gip (1873), in which the child, of uncertain parentage, is described as a 'reg'lar little gypsy, with black eyes, and black hair all over its head' (Ch.1). Stretton's description of Gip's 'black tangled curl[s]' (Ch.7) echoes a motif which figures in other nineteenth-century novels; it recalls that earlier 'gypsy brat', the 'dirty, ragged, black-haired' street-child Heathcliff of Brontë's Wuthering Heights (1847/1992, 51). This fascination with gypsy 'otherness', with its connotations of unconventionality and the dark unknown of self and society, inviting intermingled responses involving identification and rejection, recurs, of course, in the work of writers such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. In practical terms, gypsies were often the focus of attention,

and were regularly the subject of articles in newspapers and periodicals. Like other social outcasts, they were subjected to the gaze of the observer, inviting curiosity, as well as social anxiety or philanthropic concern. After visiting a gypsy camp on Christmas Eve 1868, and going to meet a party of them early in January 1869, Stretton comments in her journal, '21 of them there: a very droll and interesting scene' (3.1.1869).⁵² Later that year she wrote an article entitled 'Gipsy Glimpses', which appeared in All The Year Round. (See Appendix III to this study for a summary and discussion of this article.)

In material as well as mythological or superstitious terms, the gypsy - viewed as a social 'problem' - is often distrusted and vilified; as Stretton indicates in Two Secrets (1882), the 'strange child, belonging to nobody but gipsies', although injured and in need of help, is not willingly accepted in the homes of the cottagers.⁵³ Yet, at the same time, for the Victorians as for us today, the free, open-air lifestyle could engender a sense of envy, representing a form of escape and independence, both physical, and - at a more symbolic level, moral and social. Behlmer (1985, 238) discusses the longstanding romantic image of the free gypsy, and the association with rural values, particularly as the idea of country life became increasingly precious to city-bound readers and writers because of the fear of its imminent extinction. The gypsy, as well as constituting a source of contamination and an emblem of lawlessness - indeed, an affront to the values of civilisation - could also be conceived as a guardian of the simple life in the face of an obsession with material progress.⁵⁴

Reflecting Stretton's interest in, and concern for, the gypsy child, the story of Cassy, written in 1874, a few years after the recorded gypsy encounter, centres on a young girl from the travelling population. As Raphael Samuel (1973, 131) confirms, 'theebb and flow of wayfaring life in nineteenth-century England was strongly influenced by the weather'; Cassy's community, although wintering in the city, spends the greater part of the year encamped in Epping Forest. The text embodies a number of the contradictions and conflicting responses surrounding the gypsy image, and, at the same time, appears to reflect once again not only a wider cultural preoccupation with the 'rural' or 'pastoral', but also Stretton's own love of open spaces and natural locations, and her fear of enclosure. In setting the scene for her narrative, Stretton stresses the appeal of the as yet unenclosed areas of the forest to Londoners escaping for a summer picnic

outing, and juxtaposes her account of their 'pleasure-parties' with the material situation of her protagonist, one of the 'strange wandering population' (Ch.1). The author strains to convey the deprivation of life in the encampments:

poor and miserable dwelling places they are, even when the sun shines ... but as the autumn creeps on with its damp and chill, and the soil grows oozy with moisture, and the old worn-out canvas of the tents ... soaked through with rain and fog, then the misery and wretchedness of these summer quarters is worse than the worst alley or most crowded court in the City (Ch.1).

Here a sense of menace is evoked - the 'growling of a dog ... warns you not to trespass' - not least, as we have seen, because violent relationships are implicit in such conditions. At the same time, the yearning for the freedom of the forest experienced by such wandering people when confined to the city is also insistent. Lost and hungry in the 'squalid alleys' of London, which lay about her 'like the cobwebs in the forest', Cassy compares the narrow court where she falls asleep to a 'deep, close grave' (Ch.4). Later, with the advent of better weather, comes 'an impatient stir and longing in Cassy's heart for the change that had always returned with the spring' when, in the workhouse 'her mother would whisper to her that they would soon quit their winter-quarters for their free life on the forest' (Ch.10).

Yet another, contrasting, juxtaposition is effected through the culturally sentimentalised 'rural gypsy' image encapsulated in the homely caravan belonging to the dwarf Simon, where Cassy finds physical and emotional security, and from which symbolic vantage point the forest can be appreciated in all its beauty and fertility. Simon's van, with its cooking stove and china plates and cups, evokes the picturesque, colourful caravans associated with a more sentimentalised romantic construction of gypsy domesticity - an image sometimes linked with travelling showmen from fairs or circuses (a theme central to, and problematised in, Mrs. Walton's children's story, A Peep Behind The Scenes, 1877). The stability which Simon's van - his own property - offers is in marked contrast to the conditions of the rough encampment, and without its more sinister overtones; it constitutes a pastoral idyll which represents the antithesis of the multi-faceted deprivation which Cassy experiences within her own family, where the kettle with a piece out of the rim, the few cracked and broken pieces of crockery and the rotting straw symbolise the fractured relationships (Ch.1). Interestingly, once again the

place of safety is not provided by means of conventional family structures, but through acceptance by another kind of social outcast. In tension with alternative cultural images of darker gypsy powers, this idealised setting opens up possibilities for the biblical allusions which surround the text's enactment of a spiritual battle. At the same time, it parallels the transference of Cassy, discussed in an earlier section, from one kind of patriarchal situation to another (albeit less threatening and more reciprocal): the 'helpless' dwarf who buys Cassy from her father, and whose 'coarse and withered cheek' she kisses, is nothing like the 'rough, drunken men, such as her father, whom she had known during her wild life' (Ch.3).

6.9 Civilising the savage

A wilder gypsy-like image re-emerges in Stretton's much later full-length novel Half Brothers (1892), in the shape of an abandoned son of a secret marriage, who grows up among peasants in a remote mountain region of Italy. Here, he leads a 'savage and uncivilized life', receiving less care and attention than the animals, who are more economically viable (Ch.3). The text is interesting because, in the figure of, and in relationships with/attitudes to, this half-brother - who might be seen in some respects as a Heathcliff or Caliban - diverse related discourses of otherness converge. The multiple nuances of metaphors which encode ideological and psychological oppositions of civilised/savage, converted/heathen, educated/ignorant, English/foreigner, self/other intermingle and dominate a narrative which reveals much about notions of class and national superiority, interacting with, replicating, and, at the same time, undercutting dominant ideologies. As a central theme in a multi-stranded text which, I would suggest, is at times provocative and profoundly unsettling, the reclamation and attempted taming/integration of this 'feral' child enacts the confusions inherent in contemporary assumptions and prejudices about the nature of 'civilisation' and the desirability of a 'civilising mission'. At one level, the child represents an alter ego, constituting, in his bestiality and monstrosity, not only a personification of the father's 'sin' and 'folly' in making an unsuitable liaison (Ch.42), but also a symbol of the divided self at a wider individual and social level. Also reflected are the power relations encoded in colonialist/imperialist discourses, harnessing educational, cultural and socio-scientific attitudes regarding the heathen or barbarian 'other'. From a modern perspective, the language and views of characters are at times disturbingly racist and

prejudiced, and the tendency of the narrative voice to merge with certain prevailing social perspectives does tend once again to give the impression of authorial endorsement. Nonetheless, dominant views are problematised by the use of shifting perspectives and responses, and, arguably, a negative stance (from today's point of view) frustrated. The examination, critique and modification of moral standpoints combine with specific observations to create tensions which interrogate prevailing attitudes.

When the child Martino is discovered in his mountain hovel by a family friend, his 'nearly naked but vigorous form' and his springing movement are perceived as monkey-like; his skin is 'grimy with thick dirt', he has 'tufts of matted hair' and displays a 'savage uncouth grin' (Ch.11). As we have seen, such descriptions relate not only to notions of the savage, but were applied also to the East End street 'Arabs' (a group with whom the father in this text spends some time working, and whose environment, as previously noted, he compares to unexplored foreign lands). We can identify the associations which generate notions of the 'barbarian' freedom of the street child referred to by Hugh Cunningham (1991, 106), and confirmed in contemporary accounts cited in this study. Martino suggests the 'wild-man type', representative of 'anti-social man' whose proximity poses a threat to civil society, as discussed by Paul Brown (1994, 52) in relation to Shakespeare's Caliban.⁵⁵ When, some years later, Martino's half-brother seeks him out, he finds an apparently unsocialised being, a 'wild beast' who has been maltreated by those among whom he has been left, an outsider even in this environment. Martino is 'barely human', clinging to his den 'like an animal', but is perceived to have 'a certain susceptibility inherited from his educated/civilised parentage' which makes him 'less callous under tyranny than ... if he had been a foundling of their own race' (Ch.38). Although the family decides to bring him back to England, there is disagreement over the possibility of educating and 'civilising him'. Some are of the opinion that this 'wild and ignorant peasant', 'untrained and probably untameable', cannot be 'reclaim[ed] ... from his savagery' to become an 'English gentleman', and must 'remain a monster' (Chs.38-40). It is conceded that he can never be an educated man but a partial reclamation is attempted. Martino, now adult, is consistently described as being like a child, further drawing attention to the analogies of

child and savage, and the issues of infantilisation discussed in earlier sections of this study.

The common literary pattern of an outcast of higher origins restored to his rightful place/inheritance is problematised by the fact that Martino (now suddenly renamed Martin) resists 'rehabilitation'. Attempts to integrate him within the family on their terms fail; he continues to 'prowl' and 'scavenge'. The person who is most successful in communicating with him is an orphaned girl (now adopted into the family), who has grown up with her father in an enclosed 'gothic' environment, with little schooling, but with the freedom to wander the moors among wild creatures. Dorothy, who appears to embody a desirable synthesis of romantic wildness and perceived civilised values, responds with enthusiasm to learning opportunities, but has retained a 'fresh, simple, unfettered nature' (Ch.21), reminiscent of Sissy Jupe in Dickens's Hard Times.⁵⁶ Painfully, Martin believes in the possibility of a romantic relationship with this 'white angel', but his failure to be reconstructed in accordance with the norms of educated gentility precludes such an eventuality.

Cunningham (1991, 123), discussing contradictory facets of discourses of savagery, and the contrast between savagery and civilisation, refers to the equation of 'civilisation' with certain bourgeois virtues of the Victorian era, including hard work and self-restraint. Certainly, this text displays such associations, and at the same time underlines the preoccupation with the intrinsic superiority of English values and education. The narrative exposes contemporary perceptions of English-speaking as the norm - to be equated with 'civilisation', or at least the road to integration. There is a refusal on the part of certain characters to see identity as residing in anything other than the concept of Englishness; an English education is assumed to be synonymous with the state of civilisation, and Martino's intractability perceived as emanating from a lack of intellect/intelligence - indeed a lack of soul - which is somehow tied up with his failure to receive such an upbringing. The blindness of some sections of the community to the factors which contribute to his failure to integrate are highlighted, and condemnation of their 'civilising' or 'humanising' project, or at least of their methods, made clear. In signalling Dorothy's recognition of the importance of communicating with Martin, and teaching him to read, in his own language (Ch.51), Stretton not only invites identification with his sense of exclusion and foregrounds the need to engage with the

perspective of others rather than impose cultural norms, but also underlines the fundamental link between language and identity.

The text thus reflects nineteenth-century imperialist notions of 'civilisation' as available to others, including foreigners and 'barbarians', with the English called to facilitate progression to the level of civilisation already enjoyed by themselves. At the same time, it appears to affirm notions of the irreversible nature of cultural conditioning, and to call into question the power of 'civilisation' to transform the 'other'. Despite apparent internalisation of the discourses of superiority/the 'civilising mission', Stretton undoubtedly identifies with the frustration of a being who is forced into a mould and kept under surveillance, and she appears to problematise the concept of forced enculturation. The title of the chapter 'Captured' (Ch.42), encapsulating the paradoxes of alternative perspectives, both reproduces the assumptions of the oppressor about the nature of the victim, and acknowledges the situation of the oppressed. Martin, more at home wandering the surrounding moorlands feels 'like a wolf shut up in a stable and fastened by a chain' (Ch.51); he has 'a man's right to freedom ... not even his father was justified in keeping him under restraint, as if he was a madman' (Ch.53). The young man responds in a measure to certain family members and is willing to show dog-like obedience, but ultimately refuses to accept what Stretton describes as the 'shackles of civilisation', retreating to the moors and the womb-like security of the cave which evokes his childhood home. Such aspects of the narrative tone once again betray a certain sense of affirmation, suggesting ambivalence towards the character's continued wildness and refusal to be constrained, and an understanding of his hatred of an enclosed life 'cramped by custom and conventionality' (Ch.53). Rousseauesque valorisations of the 'noble savage' commingle with notions of the uncivilised as unenlightened or dangerous social outcast. Interestingly, one member of the family, in asserting that Martin is 'not a civilized man according to our notions', adds, 'after all, civilization is more a fashion than a reality' (Ch.41), suggesting, perhaps, a recognition of civilisation as in part a social construct, and evincing strikingly modern notions of cultural relativity.

There is a sense, in relation to these attempts at reclamation and enculturation, that in removing others from their cultural environment, the well-intentioned may be misguided: 'he felt ... that, though his sufferings were different, they were not less in

this strange country' (Ch.53). Despite the fact that Stretton does not appear to have cast major doubt in principle on the desirability of, for example, child rescue missions,⁵⁷ this suggestion is interesting from a current perspective, engaging with modern interrogation of both wider colonialist civilising missions and domestic philanthropic rescue projects which are now more readily associated with strategies of interference and social control.

Throughout Half Brothers, English 'civilised' values are alternately affirmed and dismantled, with the failings, as well as the merits, of apparently upright English characters explored. This text, like others discussed, poses many questions about moral and social attitudes, and it also seeks to explore the complexities of the father/son relationship.⁵⁸ The narrative once more evades a simplistic resolution; the closure suggests the complex consequences/limitations of choices and experiences at the same time as it offers hope for future relationships. Stretton shows yet again that 'difference' to a great extent is dependent on circumstances, lack of education, money or opportunities. Martin's intractability and, indeed, *inability* to respond beyond a certain point can perhaps be related to a comment made by her in her article 'Ragged School Union Conferences' (1883), in which she asks, in relation to the thousands of 'bare-headed, bare-footed little urchins, and the shivering little girls in their thin rags', whom the hours are 'ripening ... into thieves and prostitutes':

Shall we place them side by side with the well-fed, well-clothed children, who fill the benches of our Board schools, and demand the same work from them, and require them to submit to the same discipline? The half-starved, half-naked child, who has grown up amid depraved and vicious surroundings, is it possible he can avail himself of the teaching which suits his happier school-fellows? (268).

These are questions which bring us full circle in relation to particular facets of the complex and intersecting cultural and ideological discourses surrounding the outcast - discourses which, as I have posited throughout, can be seen, in all their contradictory and ambiguous aspects, to be strikingly illuminated and enmeshed in Stretton's work.

¹ As suggested in the Introduction to this study, whilst broadly endorsing M. Nancy Cutt's contention (1979, 133) that Stretton wrote from the point of view of the submerged and suffering in society, rather than from the perspective of the reformer/educator aiming to 'elevate the masses', I have judged it essential to further examine the complex issues involved in any attempt to represent such viewpoints.

² In discussing the agendas of publishers, we have noted the conflation of the poor or lower-class adult with the child. The narrator of Dickens's Bleak House comments on the 'favourite device' of talking to the poor as though they are children (1853/1996, 711).

³ See Stedman Jones (1984); Davidoff (1995); Walkowitz (1992); Nord (1995).

⁴ The word 'rookeries' has particular connotations of criminality, because of its associations with the word 'rook' (thief or swindler); the use of the word 'slum' as a description of overcrowded and bad housing became more common in later decades (see Gertrude Himmelfarb, 1991, 207). Stretton uses both terms.

⁵ In The Lord's Pursebearers (1883), the brother of the protagonist has also been 'long lost in the great gulf of London' (Ch. 1), such ideas again carrying moral and spiritual as well as literal and psychological connotations. Stretton, in Cobwebs and Cables (1881), utilises the image of the labyrinthine city through which the outcast protagonist wanders, to point up the moral and psychological turmoil which he must negotiate.

⁶ See also Appendix II to this study.

⁷ On occasions, they are actually described, and even refer to themselves, as 'objects', as, for example, in The Lord's Pursebearers (Ch. 2).

⁸ Mayhew attributed specific physical and moral characteristics to different groups, but also at times blurred the categories. Both the street-sellers and the nomadic population of London were at different times deemed to show a greater development of certain characteristics, displaying, for example, physical features such as more pronounced jaws and cheekbones. Such descriptions/ambiguities may have influenced later portrayals. (See Gertrude Himmelfarb, 1971, for a detailed discussion on the problem of identity in relation to Mayhew's poor). Such ideas spill over into wider class assumptions and prejudices, influencing perceptions of, for example, 'faces of a lower type' (Carola, Ch. 19).

⁹ As noted in relation to Stretton's diaries and rescue work, it is clear that she spent time in slum areas, visiting lodging houses and sometimes following street children into their homes. She confirms that characters such as the skeletal Fidge, in The Lord's Pursebearers, are based on particular individuals encountered (Preface to The Lord's Pursebearers, 1883). At the same time, in her use of names such as Tatters, she reinforces objectification, reducing individuals to the physical/sartorial markers of their condition, and recalling, in this instance, Dickens's image of a human 'bundle of tatters' (Dickens, 'The Haunted Man', 1848/1995, 295).

¹⁰ See, in particular, The Lord's Pursebearers. The infant Fidge is 'not so much a human being as a living mass of misery', and Stretton describes in stark and poignant terms the discovery the boy's dead body by his companion, Lucky: 'the sunken cheek with no flesh in it, and the strained muscles showing clearly under the parchment skin ... cold as the coldest day in winter' (Ch. 11). Underlining the child's status as now valueless object, his 'owner', Mrs. Moss, afraid of being discovered by the police, pays to have him 'chuck[ed] over a gadding wall' (Ch. 15).

¹¹ Davidoff (1995); Walkowitz (1992); (1995); P.K. Gilbert (1997).

¹² Gooderham focuses on the influence on childhood subjectivity of discourses of the body in children's literature. According to Foucault, (1979, 25) 'power relations have an immediate hold upon [the body]; they invest it, mark it, train it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs'. Foucault discusses the body as 'object and target of power', and the notion of 'docility', which 'joins the analysable body to the manipulable body', whereby 'a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (136).

¹³ See my reference to the intensity of sibling relationships (Chapter 3.6 of this study, note 50).

¹⁴ Ironically, it is the need for a respectable appearance which leads to a character's infection and death as a result of the purchase of a second-hand suit (A Thorny Path). For a discussion of respectability in dress in Stretton's work, see Janet Maynard (1998).

¹⁵ Sylvanus is Chimney Sweeper to the Society for the Suppression of Climbing Boys.

¹⁶ The child Flo in L.T. Meade's Scamp and I, waking up in a pure, white bed, mistakes her bedroom for heaven (Ch. 13).

¹⁷ Stretton's short text Mrs. Burton's Best Bedroom (1878) - which narrates an incident footnoted as 'strange', but 'strictly true', having ostensibly occurred within the writer's knowledge - cleverly combines the multiple connotations of black/white binary oppositions. Stretton foregrounds, with both humour and

seriousness, the intermingling of contrasts between ideas of cleanliness, decency, purity and holiness, and notions of squalor, deprivation, crime, immorality and spiritual impurity. Highlighting the overlap/interplay of implications, the text satirises Mrs. Burton's pretentiousness, pride and hypocrisy; it exposes her over-meticulous concern with domestic perfection, her obsession with neatness/cleanliness and her distance from real charity/acceptance of others. At the same time, it sets in relief, and imparts a lesson regarding, the condition of the 'unclean' and uncivilised in the eyes of God and society, as well as a social message regarding the material conditions of the degraded and disenfranchised. The story elaborates, literally and symbolically, the crossing of barriers of class, respectability and morality. The 'drunken vagabond' intruder who crosses Mrs. Burton's respectable threshold and makes himself at home in the private sphere of her bedroom, *literally* taints the 'whiteness' of her 'best bed' ('I shall never fancy it again'), imprinting her spotless linen with the stain of his physical dirt and filth - symbols of both a materially disadvantaged and a morally depraved, heathen 'other' environment. Both protagonists, shown to be flawed in different ways, emerge transformed/reformed in their respective embodiment of 'cleanliness'.

¹⁸ Representing an escape from 'grim reality' for adults, pubs also became 'second homes' to children (Himmelfarb, 1991, 60) - a situation reflected in Stretton's suggestion that young children like 'Gip' can readily make their own way to the spirit-vault (*Lost Gip*, Ch. 2). The common practice cited by Himmelfarb (1991, 61) of 'forcing the fiery liquid down the throats of crying infants' is represented in a number of Stretton's narratives. In the eyes of one child protagonist, getting drunk is a 'curious and mysterious pleasure' enjoyed by older people, rather than any kind of sin (*The Lord's Pursebearers*, Ch. 10).

¹⁹ Benjamin Waugh (1873, 95) refers to the 'wild energy' of the streets. Charles Booth in his *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1891/Keating (ed), 1976, 116-7) alludes, in respect of one category of the poor, to those who 'cannot stand the regularity and dulness of civilized existence, and find the excitement they need in the life of the streets'.

²⁰ See Kaplan's (1992) account in general, and relevant comments (126).

²¹ The association of the rural environment with childhood *and* innocence is encapsulated in the assertion that in the 'sunshine and bracing air of the fields' one is 'as far from murder or any other sin as a child is' (*Hester Morley's Promise*, Ch. 22).

²² See Raymond Williams (1985, 281) regarding the 'larger context' reflected in novels from at least mid-nineteenth century, again, as discussed, engaging with the idea (and practice) of emigration to the colonies as a solution to the poverty and overcrowding of the cities; see also Heather Shore (2000) on so-called 'progressive' methods of treatment/punishment for actual or potential juvenile delinquents.

²³ This reflects observations such as those by Mayhew, with regard to the street-folk, in terms of a more pronounced development of the animal than of the intellectual or moral nature. See also Cunningham (1991) generally, and 122 on savage/animal analogies and street-children.

²⁴ A blending/juxtaposition of images and myths is encapsulated in Stretton's picturesque flower-seller, with her 'basket of violets and primroses', the scent of which 'mingled with the fumes of the spirit-vaults' (*The Lord's Pursebearers*, Ch. 10).

²⁵ Stretton perhaps articulates her own privileging of practicality over sentiment in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, in which the protagonist, in gratitude for the hospitality extended to her by the needy inhabitants of a village, finances the installation of a fountain and drains - projects which, it is stressed, reflect neither 'sentiment' nor 'romance' (Part 3, Ch. 21).

²⁶ See Ross (1993, 12) on the subject of 'rough/respectable distinctions' as meaningful sources of pride and shame, and the instability of these categories. The situation of protagonists in Stretton's work is sometimes described, as it is in Mrs. Gaskell's writing, as 'decent' poverty - see, for example, *A Man of His Word* (Ch. 4). As a literary device, the use of a 'fall in caste' invites cross-class engagement and also permits middle-class or 'respectable' protagonists to experience/mingle with outcast society. Characters have often seen better times/enjoyed higher status (for example, the former musician in *A Thorny Path*), or are of good or better 'stock' than their companions.

²⁷ See Gertrude Himmelfarb (1991, 122) for a detailed discussion of the development of general distinctions between different kinds of poor, between, for example, the 'undeserving' and 'deserving' or 'respectable poor', between paupers and the labouring poor. She notes the focus on the dependent or potentially dependent poor - the Malthusian poor, living in conditions of 'misery and vice', the Mayhewian 'nomadic' poor and the 'ragged' and 'dangerous' element - and the shift in public concern towards the needs of the 'deserving or 'labouring' poor during the final decades of the nineteenth century.

²⁸ Once again, we must consider the identification by the reader of the critique behind perceptions rendered as part of the narration, but merging with the thoughts of the child protagonist - a strategy which

makes the authorial opinion unclear. In fact, as we have seen, it is actually Sandy who confronts and influences the father of the household, reinforcing the cumulative message that assumptions and prejudices - and their internalisation by the oppressed/excluded - can be effectively challenged and modified.

²⁹ See also my discussion of a socialist vision (Chapter 7.3 of this study).

³⁰ See, for example, in David Lloyd's Last Will (1869), the suggestion by a protagonist that being reduced to living in a smaller house would mean that 'everybody would think we were poor. It would never do at all' (Vol. 1, Ch.23). We can relate such sentiments to the sense of class insecurity reflected in E. Nesbit's much later portrayal of the family who are reluctant to reveal that they cannot afford a holiday, and who draw the blinds in the pretence that they are away from home (The Story of the Treasure Seekers, 1899, Ch. 3). As we have noted, the distinctions and confusions inherent in attitudes to poverty and notions of class/breeding, result in contradictions in Stretton's writing. Her implied condemnation of the snobbery and prejudice displayed by characters such as Aunt Charlotte (Alone in London), who are fearful of 'low' manners, is in tension with personal and wider cultural insecurities which involve both the blurring and the separation of poverty and social status, influencing constructions and representations of difference.

³¹ M. Nancy Cutt (1979) contextualises Stretton's preoccupation with fears of/conditions in the workhouse. The extent to which the dread of the workhouse, and associated perceptions of shame, operated as a form of social control, with those in need prepared to go to any lengths to avoid incarceration, is highlighted in Stretton's work.

³² Harrison quotes Archbishop Manning's allegation at a prohibitionist meeting in 1871 that 'there is not a sin which the imagination of man can conceive which is not rife in that north Bank of the River Thames' (Harrison, 1973, 181), a belief frequently echoed in the tone of Stretton's texts with reference to certain areas of London.

³³ An illustration to this section of Stretton's text shows the fashionable folk, in their finery, sharply defined at the centre of the park scene, with the 'poor relations' in greyer focus at the edge of the picture, highlighting their position as outsiders and onlookers (see Appendix IIu to this study). Stretton repeatedly draws attention in her texts to the growing disparity between rich and poor, sometimes invoking, as does Mrs. Gaskell, the Dives and Lazarus motif. Like Gaskell, who, in Mary Barton, had written of the masters only cutting short 'in things for show' while 'it's in things for life' that the poor have to 'stint' (1848/1987, 453), Stretton both satirises and overtly critiques the attitudes of the well-off, for whom 'undendurable privation' (David Lloyd's Last Will) means giving up extra comforts rather than being 'in want of the commonest necessities of life' (Introduction to G. Holden Pike (1875, xiii). She angrily condemns the kind of society which allows the poor be 'stinted' in these 'absolute necessities', whilst 'luxury and waste run riot on every hand' (A Thorny Path, 1879, Ch.19).

³⁴ Stretton's diaries, as discussed, show that she was also interested in court proceedings. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, she records a number of visits to the Assizes.

³⁵ This accords with Benjamin's Waugh's suggestion (1873/1984, 24) regarding the criminal class as a 'revengeful class'.

³⁶ Such justifications for criminal activities are, of course, commonly expressed in our own times. Stretton, as discussed, also shows that middle-class perpetrators of crimes such as financial fraud are nothing more than 'common thieves', and can be reduced to similar circumstances. When the adult middle-class protagonist of Cobwebs and Cables becomes an outcast as a consequence of such a scandal, he, like the street boy/vagrant, finds himself subject to the authority of the street police and ordered to 'move on' (Ch.39).

³⁷ Such a statement recalls the conclusion reached by Mrs. Gaskell's John Barton (Mary Barton, 1848/1987, 437) that the Bible 'must be a sham put upon poor ignorant folk'.

³⁸ Cunningham examines the intersection of the increasingly professionalised discourses of juvenile delinquency with the rhetoric of evangelical missionary endeavours in respect of neglected children, and with the frequently sentimentalised and exoticised imagery perpetuated by artists and writers on the subject of street children. The language of imperialism, race and class are linked with concepts of the child; the influence of evolutionary debates and the use of metaphors of civilisation/savagery and otherness are implicated.

³⁹ Significantly, it is David's love for his mother which sets him apart from other criminals (In Prison and Out); similarly, it is the fidelity of his mother which enables Ishmael (No Place Like Home) to survive prison, with notions of home and mother conflated. Mrs. Sumner (1893, writing about maternal responsibility, suggests that the boy's first ideal woman is his mother (67); only she can exert a 'softening' influence on boys who are struggling through life with terrible odds against them (63).

⁴⁰ As Charles Dickens emphasises, the 'wild' condition of being without shoes and stockings was associated with 'grow[ing] up bad' ('The Chimes', 1844/1995, 83). Dickens's Alderman is determined to 'Put boys without shoes and stockings, Down' and to 'convict 'em summarily' (83). When the freedom-loving protagonist of Stretton's The Children of Cloverley is caught trespassing, the mistress of the house refuses to believe that the 'bare-footed and bare-headed' Ben comes from a reputable family. His appearance marks him out as a 'rascal', a 'vagabond and a thief' (Ch.11), fit only for jail. Aunt Charlotte (Alone in London) is horrified to find a 'common' boy without 'boots, or a cap on his head' in the company of a child from her own family: 'if this little girl's mother saw her going about with a boy in bare feet and a bare head, it 'ud break her heart' (Ch.10, entitled, sardonically, 'Highly Respectable').

⁴¹ Exceptions occur, as, for example, in the case of Rachel in The Storm of Life, who spends time in prison.

⁴² In Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848/1987), policemen are regarded with fear as 'those ogres of our streets to all unlucky urchins' (434). Much later, Elizabeth Rossiter (1881, 569) comments that the police report 'with genuine fervour' that boys are 'our greatest trouble'.

⁴³ These illustrations share similarities with Gustave Doré's illustrations of London street scenes, in particular his 'The Bull's Eye', 1872, where the searchlight of the law picks out the huddling vagrants. (Reproduced in Treuherz, 1987; see also Appendix IIv-IIz to this study.)

⁴⁴ See also Heather Shore (2000) for a re-evaluation of traditional accounts of the rise of juvenile delinquency and evolution of legislative/penal policy, with a focus on the influence of 'constructions' of the deviant child and on the on-going relevance of delinquency issues under debate.

⁴⁵ In 'Women's Work for Children' (1893), Stretton emphasises that 'what the nation will be thirty years hence depends chiefly on what the children of the present decade are' (12).

⁴⁶ Shore (2000, 23), focusing on the image of the beggar-boy as depicted in A.E. Mulready's (1879) 'A Recess on a London Bridge', records that in 1851-55, 848 boys were committed to Tothill Fields prison for 'Begging, or sleeping in the open air'. Hesba Stretton suggests that police and justices were also hard on beggars in country areas: a young protagonist in Shrewsbury is warned that 'if they catch you begging they'll lock you up for five years in a reformatory' (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.13).

⁴⁷ Waugh (1873/1984, 85) estimates that 3,000 children a year were being swept from the streets of the metropolis into gaols.

⁴⁸ David Englander (1989, 551) quotes an estimate of the Jewish population at the end of the century as 140,000 to 150,000.

⁴⁹ Brian Cheyette (1993), exploring 'semitic' discourse in relation to the representation of Jews in English literature and society writes of the 'doubleness' of such discourse, which incorporates ambivalent images of 'the Jew'. Discussing naturalised constructions of an 'eternal mythic Jew', Cheyette posits the instability of 'the Jew' as signifier (8) and draws attention to the positioning of the Jew as both outside and a part of 'culture'. He foregrounds an 'Arnoldian ideal of "culture"', with the newly assimilated Jew exemplifying 'the Enlightenment virtues of tolerance, justice and equality' (5) and 'constructed in equivocal terms as both the embodiment of a transformable cultural Hebraism and ... an unchanging racial "other"' (5-6). The figure of the Jew, he suggests, is harnessed to represent both sides of a social/political divide, and to signify 'the "best" and the "worst" of selves' (12).

⁵⁰ In terms of the destabilisation of gender boundaries, this relationship tends, arguably, to suggest a mother-daughter dynamic.

⁵¹ Stretton makes occasional observations about Jewish acquaintances in her early diaries; she comments on encounters with 'high-caste' Jews and records meeting a converted Jew. On one occasion, she includes 'Jews, milliners, tailors, etc.' in a casual reference to 'essentially vulgar' people attending a picnic (Log Book: 25.6.1863). Later textual representations are more complex, and reflect perceptions of both difference and commonality between different religious and social groups; in her preface to The Highway of Sorrow (1894), Stretton compares the persecution of the Stundists to that of the Jews, but suggests that whereas the Jews have 'powerful friends', the Stundists have no-one to represent them. The portrayal of a Russian Jew in The Highway of Sorrow positions him as secretly sympathetic towards the persecuted Stundists, but outwardly unsupportive because of his fear of being implicated in resistance to established authority. At the conclusion of this text, a young Jew is exiled alongside the Stundists because revolutionary papers are found in his possession, and, as a political prisoner and Jew by birth, he is banished without trial to the farthest settlements.

⁵² Stretton does not record the precise purpose of the visits, but notes 'Miss Rye, the emigration woman there' (Log Book: 3.1.1869).

⁵³ As Gillian Avery (1965, 200) notes, in Mrs. Ewing's Lob Lie-by-the-Fire (reviewed, as discussed, along with Stretton's The King's Servants in 1873) doubt is cast as to whether a child assumed to be of

gypsy blood should be taken into the house, underlining the superstition and mistrust surrounding the gypsy-figure. In Stretton's 'A Provincial Post-Office', the narrator, looking back to childhood, tells of 'talismanic' precautions to 'secure me from gipsies and other baby-stealers, who were the terror of our infancy' (28.2.1863, 12).

⁵⁴ Cultural engagement with the mysteries of gypsy life was also fuelled by the writings of George Borrow, who recorded his travels and experiences with the gypsy community in his accounts Lavengro (1851) and The Romany Rye (1857). Underlining the ambiguous appeal of the romantic image, Borrow comments on the fact that 'it was much more agreeable to play the gypsy or the tinker than to become either in reality' (Borrow, 1857/1948, 89). Stretton, in her novel The Doctor's Dilemma, highlights the harnessing of the gypsy figure as signifier of freedom/resistance to over-civilisation, in her protagonist's ambivalent reaction to the renewed constraints and markers (such as kid gloves) of a luxurious 'genteel' lifestyle: 'Hitherto, my mode of life had been almost as wandering and free as that of a gipsy'; 'I felt as if we were gipsies, suddenly caught, and caged in a splendid captivity' (Part 3, Ch.22, entitled, significantly, 'Too Highly Civilised').

⁵⁵ Brown quotes Hayden White's description, in his 'archaeology' of the wild-man type: 'he is just out of sight, over the horizon, in the nearby forest, desert, mountains, or hills. He sleeps in crevices, under great trees, or in the caves of wild animals' (Brown, 1994, 52). This seems to be the essence of Stretton's representation of Martino.

⁵⁶ Her role as mentor also evokes aspects of the relationship between the younger Catherine and Hareton in Bronte's Wuthering Heights.

⁵⁷ I have noted her reservations about institutional care, and the ambivalence suggested by protagonists' resistance to the conformity imposed on 'charity-school girls', who are pitied as they march in a long line along the streets (The Lord's Pursebearers, Ch.10).

⁵⁸ Although this study has directed a spotlight onto the prominent theme of mother-child relationships in Stretton's work, in several texts the complexities of the father-son relationship provide a subject for scrutiny.

CHAPTER 7

RELIGION, ROMANCE, REFORM AND REVOLUTION: THE RUSSIAN CONNECTION

As this study has demonstrated, Hesba Stretton reaches out beyond the concerns of her homeland, to raise awareness of diverse experiences of oppression and marginalisation in other parts of the world. Towards the end of her career, her interest in the outcast was channelled into a particularly intriguing project, which centres on the trials of a community subjected to persecution in a region far beyond Stretton's native shore. The present chapter will be devoted to an investigation into what might be termed the 'Russian Connection'; it will direct attention onto the area of her writings on the Russian Stundist sect, and her association with leading anarchists in London during the 1890s.

During this period, as noted, Stretton published several texts which revolve around the persecution, imprisonment and exile, by the Orthodox Authorities, of the dissident Stundists - an evangelical sect with ties to the western Baptist community (Senese, 1987, 55), who rejected iconolatry and ritual. Stretton weaves fictional narratives around actual events and persons, interfusing religious themes, romance and social critique. Although mentioned briefly by modern scholars, these texts have escaped serious scrutiny. My study reveals the extent to which they provide a vehicle for various forms of subversive comment; in common with her other writings, they exhibit considerable moral complexity, embodying cultural tensions and inviting multiple levels of engagement.

In her preface to one of the novels in question, Stretton writes:

I have written "The Highway of Sorrow" [1894] in collaboration with a well-known Russian author, now an exile in England, who has supplied me with the outlines of the story; especially with the prison and Siberian incidents, which he assures me are founded on fact. It would have been impossible for me to have done this work without help as complete as that which he has rendered.

The author concerned was Sergei Kravchinsky (known in the West as Stepniak), a revolutionist implicated in the assassination of the Russian state official, General Mezentev (Introduction to Johnson (ed.), 1993, 10/11). Stepniak subsequently moved to London, where he mixed with radical and liberal intellectuals.

Biographical profiles of Stretton mention a Russian connection, relating the story that Tsar Alexander II ordered her waif story, Jessica's First Prayer (1867), to be placed in Russian Schools, an order which was later revoked (Memoir, The Sunday at Home, 1911). M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 130-1) states that the continued banning of the text was directly connected to Stretton's perceived support for the anarchist cause, but does not supply a source for this information. Accounts and bibliographical entries refer to the fund set up by Stretton for the relief of Russian peasants during the severe famine which occurred during 1891-2, but do not elaborate.¹ Critical accounts such as those by Cutt (1979), J.S. Bratton (1981), and more recently Suzanne Rickard (1996), do not explore in any detail the factors underlying this phase of Stretton's writing. Cutt (1979, 130) does, however, make the significant comment that, although the Stretton legend emphasises her support for the Stundists, it fails to make the connection between her reliance for information on the émigrés and her implicit support for the cause of nihilism.

The association is intriguing, particularly if considered in the light of the official portrait of Hesba Stretton, which remained uncontested for many years. She was, as we have seen, acknowledged as an influential writer and philanthropist, but the legend, in which she was to some extent complicit, also constructed her as a reserved and very 'proper' figure. The inaccuracy and inadequacy of this assessment has been demonstrated; my study confirms her complexity, independence and subversiveness.

7.1 Anarchic associations; unlikely alliances

Clearly, in focusing on Stretton's interest in this aspect of Russian affairs, we can identify areas of mutual concern. Nonetheless, questions arise, namely: What other factors underlie this collaboration, and to what extent was she aware of the political implications of her involvement? Why was a well-known evangelical writer working closely with a group of atheists² and nihilists? Was advantage taken of her position and sympathies, or indeed did various agendas converge to mutual benefit?

Unfortunately, the sources to which we might look in order to shed direct light on such questions are limited. It has been necessary to draw chiefly on references contained in Captain Webb's 1964 notes, which, as discussed, provide selected summarised entries or brief extracts from Stretton's diaries, together with Webb's personal and sometimes rather cryptic comments on her activities.

From his summary of the 1890s, we learn that on July 2nd, 1890, Stretton attended a committee of the Friends of Russian Freedom and met Stepniak. Webb adds, in parentheses: 'Sergius. S. - The Career of a Nihilist' On July 9th she attended a lecture by (Prince) Peter Kropotkin, a leading anarchist, in London since the 1880s,³ and co-founder of the anarchist-communist monthly Freedom (Kropotkin 1899/Ward (ed.), 1978, 334). Webb records that on October 24th his great-aunt visited Stepniak and Volkhovsky (also an exile, and sub-editor of Free Russia), and he quotes Stretton's words: "'A curious episode in our life'".

These entries coincide with the formation in London, in association with the émigrés, of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, and the first publication of their paper, Free Russia (Senese 1987, 48).⁴ This followed a decade during which the socialist movement in England had been gaining momentum (Kropotkin, 1899/Ward (ed.), 1978, 332), and which saw the founding, in 1884, of the Fabian Society. As part of their strategy for mobilising Western opinion against the Tsarist Government, the émigrés had gained entry into the growing circle of English socialists, and were on 'more or less intimate terms' with almost all the leading figures (Senese, 39). The committee of the Society of Friends was composed mainly of Englishmen, including prominent politicians, editors and clergymen. (Introduction to Johnson (ed.), 1993, 3; Senese, 48). Stepniak had published articles and books, and during the 1890s was lecturing several times a week, under the auspices of the Society, on conditions in Russia (Senese, 37). At this time, both Felix Volkhovsky and the American explorer/writer George Kennan were also lecturing on the sufferings in Russian prisons and exile.⁵ Donald Senese describes the composition of audiences, which included 'socialists and clergymen, religious ladies and agnostics, anarchists and vegetarians, professors [and] doctors ...' (Senese, 37). We cannot be certain of the circumstances of Stretton's introduction and

involvement; she was acquainted with leading figures, and was used to attending public meetings, but I have not found mention of her in accounts relating to the émigré circle. It is believed that Stretton's connection with the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, and with the writer George Kennan, was established through her contacts in the publishing world, including T. Fisher Unwin, whom Senese (48) describes as a key member of the SFRF. Webb notes that members of Stretton's family were, during part of this period, in Bedford Park (where, in fact, the Stepniaks were living and holding 'at homes'), and she may have had contact with them there. There is also a brief reference in Webb's account to a friendship between his Aunt Elsie and the daughter of William Morris, which might indicate a relevant link.⁶ Following the death of Stepniak, Stretton appears to have lost contact with the group.

What Stretton had described as an 'episode' was, as we know, to be more than a transitory association. Unfortunately, however, Webb provides little information, apart from recording for early 1891: 'HS helping the Free Russians. Vera Volkhovsky, a charming child, with a very sad experience';⁷ and, for August that year: 'HS started a Russian Fund: it went to £890.' No further mention of the Russian connection is made until the beginning of 1894, when Webb comments that HS wrote Paul [Rodenko?] for Stepniak, and took it to the Syndicate of Authors. It has not been possible to trace an English edition of this book, which appears in some catalogues as a Russian title by Stepniak.⁸ Senese (19, note 22) refers to the 'short novel Stundist Pavel Rudenko' in connection with Stepniak's writings on the dissidents, and cites textual material which clearly corresponds to that contained in Stretton's The Highway of Sorrow (published that year), in which Rudenko (sic) is the protagonist.⁹ Webb records that Stretton lunched with George Kennan, and this would tally with an entry in Olive Garnett's Bloomsbury Diary which confirms that Kennan was lecturing and socialising in London during January 1894 (Garnett, in Johnson (ed.), 1993, 19 and 24). There may have been problems with publication, as Webb notes that in June Appleton's of New York agreed to take the Russian story, and adds 'read of the difficulties over Paul Rodenko: Cassell's took it, signed [series of asterisks]'.¹⁰

Webb (and presumably the diary) is silent on the subject from this point, save for a single quotation on December 23rd 1895: "'Stepniak was killed, whilst crossing the railway.'" (A verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned at the inquest; the

circumstances of the accident have, however, been the subject of speculation by contemporaries and historians.)¹¹ The perceived sensitivity of the association may have led Webb to withhold information. However, the note of glee in his aside, for July 1890, regarding Stepniak - 'I have his flageolet here - won't I be clapped in prison for that [series of exclamation marks]' - suggests a vicarious thrill. Arguably, if other references had existed, he would readily have included them, despite apparently relishing a sense of mystery. Also, Stretton's notebooks reveal that, whilst some important matters and attitudes are recorded, other significant areas are neglected by the author. Whatever the reason, we are left with little direct information about a period of several years during which Stretton must have been closely involved with aspects of Russian politics, and engaged in writing fiction based on experiences and ideas surrounding it.

Absence of direct sources has prompted a more oblique approach. In an attempt to gain insights into this collaboration, it has been useful to consult accounts by/relating to the Russian exiles (in particular, Kropotkin's 1899 Memoirs, and Donald Senese's 1987 study of the London years). Such works illuminate the prevailing cultural and political climate, and chart the activities and opinions of the émigrés. Viewed in conjunction with an examination of the particular Stretton texts under consideration - and an understanding of her wider preoccupations - these accounts facilitate the identification of possible motives, intersecting agendas and areas of convergence. They also permit us to contextualise further the relations of power represented in Stretton's work.

7.2 Shared sympathies and textual opportunities

In considering the subject matter of these narratives, we can see the attraction of the issues. Stretton's sympathies would naturally have been aroused on behalf of the Stundists; their simple faith accorded with the belief in a personal relationship with God which underpins much of her writing, and which she contrasts with the perceived superstitions and hypocrisy of the established Church. The context perhaps functioned as a displacement for grievances against the official Church at home, and no doubt suited the agenda of The Religious Tract Society, who later (1897) published her Stundist story In the Hollow of His Hand. For a writer interested in relations of power and the abuse of authority, and whose principal thematic concerns were the

maltreatment and exclusion of society's outcasts, the sufferings of a minority persecuted by the powerful state authorities for living according to their consciences presented a new area of injustice to be exposed in the form of narrative. As one of Stretton's characters makes clear, 'The Government is too strong, and the Church is too strong, for feeble folks like us to resist them' (In the Hollow of His Hand, Ch.29). The Stundists have 'no one to plead their cause before the world' (Preface, The Highway of Sorrow); through these texts, Stretton aims to participate in that task. She was clearly shocked by accounts of the conditions in Russia and by the brutality inflicted on those persecuted; in her fiction she portrays in graphic detail their experiences of prison and exile.¹² The powerlessness of the downtrodden or marginalised is illustrated by the order, in The Highway of Sorrow, to 'drag [the dissenters] to church by force, or drive them in with sticks, like a set of troublesome beasts, as they are'. The call to 'flog [them] to church like naughty children' further points up the convergence of areas addressed and the commonality of forms of coercion (Ch.25).

In particular, Hesba Stretton would have been drawn to the situation of women and children, a theme which dominates her writing. The shared marginalisation - indeed the negation of identity - experienced by women and children is epitomised in their omission from the sign numbering the inhabitants of a Siberian village: 34 houses, 65 males. As Stretton emphasises, they literally do not count (In the Hollow of His Hand, Ch.26). An insistent theme in her work, as we have seen, is patriarchal oppression of women of all classes, and in the 'Russian' narratives Stretton exploits thematic opportunities to engage with wider gender debates. The anger which repeatedly surfaces regarding the notion of women as the property of men finds renewed expression in The Highway of Sorrow, in which family pressures and the tensions between romantic fulfilment and religious/moral commitment form a central theme. In this text, the situation of a Russian arranged marriage - 'decided by the arbitrary will of fathers' (Ch.3), influenced by 'sordid considerations of property and prospects' and negotiated to suit the economic interests of the family - clearly parallels her exposure and interrogation of patriarchal manipulation in situations closer to home. The notion of a woman as the object of bargaining - no longer possessing any freedom or rights of her own after marriage and becoming a man's 'servant and drudge' (The Highway of

Sorrow, Ch.3) - although presented as part of the particular Russian way of life, clearly echoes the sentiments identified in numerous other contexts.

Masculine demonstrations of power and aggression are again challenged in these narratives; despite the strengths of male leadership, the critical judgement of women is often identified as superior. As discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, attitudes which result in the glorification of war are exposed and transformed - largely through the agency of a child - in Max Kromer (1871). Hesba Stretton, in her preface to that text, writes of the 'misery produced by the crimes and mistakes of men'. In the narrative In the Hollow of His Hand, it is, significantly, the women who are the first to question and brood over the treatment of the Stundists. More obliquely, Stretton - whilst reproducing biblical endorsements - appears, at the same time, to be interrogating male perceptions of the value of martyrdom. Despite the prefatory allusion to 'rewards in heaven', there is surely a note of bitter irony in the identification of women's 'placid resignation' in the face of men's sense of exultation at the prospect of the 'glory' which will follow tribulation; there is an implicit questioning of the suffering, hunger and death forced upon families as a result of the blind acceptance of these concepts. The consequences, for the children, of parents acting by their conscience are foregrounded; moral complexities are brought into focus, and the triumph of sacrifice weighed against its material effects. Textual ambivalence once again opens up the possibility of opposing responses, unsettling the surface articulation of spiritual reward as compensatory; the religious zeal of both sides is called into question. Garnett's diary reveals that Volkhovsky's lectures contained emotive accounts of the Russian Government stealing children from their parents (Garnett, in Johnson (ed.), 1993, 26). As this study has revealed, Stretton exhibits throughout her writing - both overtly and at an unconscious level - a preoccupation with the intensities of the mother-child bond. The separation of children from their parents - the strategy employed by the Authorities against the Stundists as a means of enforcing compliance, and emphasised as 'the strongest weapon of all in the Orthodox armoury' (Ch.8) - is, as discussed, central to In the Hollow of His Hand (1897), resonating with this deeply rooted concern.

If we consider the motivations of the émigrés we can see that it was just such sympathies which they aimed to harness. They found within English liberal/radical circles an increasing receptivity to their ideas and themes. Recent scholarship suggests

that the main reason for Stepniak's choice of London as a place of exile was that it provided the 'most effective forum and the most appreciative audience for the sort of propaganda campaign he had already resolved to undertake' (Senese, 1987, 27). The group also recognised the need to 'shape the agitation to suit the English character' (Senese, 24).

Senese writes of their tendency to exploit every major issue. He cites Free Russia's presentation of the famine, and its success in establishing itself near the centre of a substantial humanitarian crusade. Anyone reading it 'might have assumed that it was an ad hoc organ set up to organize relief for the famine-stricken in Russia' (Senese, 54). This blurring of political and humanitarian agendas is perhaps pertinent to Stretton's campaign on behalf of the peasants - and indeed to diverse aspects of the association, although other factors suggest this is an oversimplification.

The question of the exploitation/adaptation of material and medium suggests an important point of interaction, namely the convergence of genre(s), an area which has implications for my overall project. In exploring cultural representations of outcast society, I have identified recurring links between the use of melodrama and the expression of social/political concerns. Accounts of the émigrés highlight the use of sensationalism in written narratives and the dramatic renderings of the experiences of the persecuted given in lectures. Senese discusses Stepniak's choice, for much of his writing, of the genre of popular fiction rather than more serious, but less saleable, intellectual discussion, and notes his tendency to romanticise in an attempt to tailor material to audience expectations (Senese, 1987, 9). According to Kropotkin, censorship in Russia had led Stepniak to resort to alternative genres to convey his ideas; in one instance, for example, he presented an exposition of socialism in the form of a fairy tale (Kropotkin, 1899/Ward (ed.), 1978, 226). This approach also reflects a desire to take advantage of access to the general reading public, and the longstanding conviction that theorists 'must bring their ideas to the people in "popular form, under popular guise ..."' (Senese, 6). Arguably, as I have suggested in other contexts, this was what Stretton had long been achieving with her particular blend of popular fiction, historical fact, melodrama, evangelical message and social polemic, interacting with other similarly constituted, but differently configured, forms of cultural expression.¹³

With regard to practical aspects of collaboration, Stepniak had produced a number of his books in association with other writers.¹⁴ Although an able linguist - Kropotkin records being impressed by his facility for fast translation (Kropotkin, 1899/Ward (ed.), 1978, 223) - he apparently never fully mastered English, a fact which he feared might hamper his influence (Senese, 29). Collaboration with Stretton offered the opportunity for technical assistance, and a vehicle for the dissemination of information and ideas to a pre-existing market, in a popular and familiar style and form. Stepniak no doubt recognised the usefulness of a connection with a widely-read and respected writer on religious and social themes, whose texts produced by publishers such as The Religious Tract Society were translated for world-wide distribution. In turn, the association provided Stretton with material suited to her own literary, religious and political agenda.

7.3 Community and brotherhood: a 'social gospel' and a 'gospel of socialism'

The overlap/interplay between religion and socialism - and, indeed, revolution - is significant, offering various points of intersection. The period in question saw a transfer of social energies from religion to politics, but at the same time a convergence in terms of ideas, framework and rhetoric, involving multiple overlap of metaphor. At a simple level, both agendas contain elements of a conversion mission, but the interaction is multifaceted.

We can identify links in the chain of association, involving, clearly, the relationship between a 'social gospel' and a 'gospel of socialism'. As Raphael Samuel notes, the rekindling of the social question is closely associated with progressive forces in Protestant Non-Conformity (Samuel, 1998, 305-6). Samuel also identifies the waif novels as a contributory factor in the development of what Beatrice Webb termed 'social compunction' (Samuel, 307).¹⁵ Stretton's concern for reform permeates her writing from the earliest stages; in Enoch Roden's Training (1865, Ch.14), she lays out the suggested conditions of a form of socialist Utopia, which has biblical foundations.¹⁶ These later texts engage with increasing pressure for social and political change, and also with the re-emergence of strands of Christian Socialism. There are clearly parallels between the concept of a religious and a socialist brotherhood, and these are foregrounded in Stretton's treatment of Russian themes, resonating with her advocacy of mutual and collective support. A genuine sense of brotherhood promises the

amelioration of the social condition of the world, as suggested in The Highway of Sorrow, (Ch.20). The social co-operation exhibited by a colony of ants is contrasted with the antagonistic behaviour of human beings - conduct which she describes elsewhere as the 'tyranny man exercised over man' (In The Hollow of His Hand, Ch.29). The analogy reflects Kropotkin's views regarding the widespread misappropriation of Darwin's theories to justify eugenicist attitudes/ policies in respect of race or class. According to his memoirs, Kropotkin's interpretation was that mutual aid was as much a law of nature as mutual struggle, and more essential for progressive evolution (Kropotkin/Ward (ed.), 335-7).¹⁷ For Stretton, support for the disadvantaged is axiomatic; as I discuss in other sections, social Darwinist notions of inferiority and degeneracy are both reproduced and subjected to interrogation through the complexities of her work. Notions of the Russian peasantry as, in part, 'superstitious' and 'brutish' - containing elements which are perceived as manifestly 'other' in relation to the clean and well-mannered Stundists - mingle with outrage at the abuse of power exercised by the 'Autocrat of all the Russians'.¹⁸

The anarchists had long recognised the revolutionary potential of the Russian sectarians. In England, their persecution invited wide coverage: as Pease, secretary of the Fabians emphasised, to the English the idea that people must suffer for their religion seemed 'a terrible injustice'; the Stundists, with their English connections, were an ideal object of sympathy (Senese, 55). In Stretton's The Highway of Sorrow, the agnostic revolutionary Valerian - indulging in the 'Russian passion of unrest, which took possession of the nation about the middle of the present century' (Ch.10) - is particularly interested in the spread of Stundism amongst the peasantry, seeing it as 'a field where his own political propagandism ought to find good soil' (Ch.20).¹⁹ It is made clear that the struggle for political and religious freedom are to be viewed as one. In The Highway of Sorrow, the friends, Paul and Valerian, each hopeful of converting the other, have open discussions about religion and revolution - discussions which, as well as indicating areas of disagreement, plainly highlight common ground.²⁰ Senese confirms that this convergence of ideas is foregrounded in Stepniak's Stundist Pavel Rudenko (Senese, 1987, 19). Although they were atheists, Stepniak and Kropotkin drew on the New Testament for their propaganda. Senese (4) points out that Stepniak had spent time with Russian sectaries, 'arguing theological and social questions and

interpreting the Gospel in a revolutionary sense'. Kropotkin records that Sergei, who knew the New Testament almost by heart, spoke to the peasants as a religious preacher, teaching them their rights and using biblical quotations to convince them of the need to revolt (Kropotkin/Ward (ed.), 225), a situation reproduced in The Highway of Sorrow. Stretton's story confirms that the aim of the Propagandists is to teach the peasantry 'its rights, its powers, and the wrongs it suffered' (Ch.23). The harnessing of religion for radical ends is again relevant, as in other areas of Stretton's work, where I have identified her appropriation (and concomitant critique of cultural distortions) of a biblical model of freedom and equality for purposes of social/feminist protest.²¹

But to what extent would Stretton have been aware of the group's full revolutionary agenda, and its associations with violence? How far would she have been actively complicit in perpetuating anarchic ideas and propaganda through the vehicle of her fiction? A suggestion of naivety overlooks the fact that here was an extremely well read, well informed and politically engaged woman. It also fails to consider the texts.

The Highway of Sorrow contains a clear acknowledgement of the revolutionary agenda, and of the harnessing of dissident causes for purposes of propaganda and incitement; ideals are expounded, arguments explored. Areas of commonality are identified, although it is evident that Stretton was aware of tensions between the Stundist and revolutionary causes. She establishes a distance by signalling the Stundists' tenet of non-resistance; they are bound to 'shun all men who rebel against the powers that be' (Ch.6). Yet, I would argue that the text retains a foot in both camps, seeking to mediate, and effectively enacting a dialogue which serves to explore the workings of power and to interrogate forms of truth. Despite a reaction, filtered through the perspective of certain characters, that, by challenging religious assumptions, the agnostic revolutionary Valerian has destroyed another's faith (a faith later reaffirmed), the narrative displays a degree of openness and ambivalence. The condemnatory perspective is not definitive; the closure emphasises co-operation and a common bond rather than difference, error or lack of redemption. Valerian and Paul stand 'side by side' in their exile, each accepting the other, and respecting the other's views.

In considering Stretton's involvement, it is important to emphasise the general climate in England, the hostility towards the Russian government (engaging with a distrust of

absolute forms of power and with general social/political discontent), and the impact of the campaign to win popular sympathy. Many 'peaceful' Englishmen stressed, after hearing the lectures given here on the subject, and reading material written by Stepniak and others, that they would be Nihilists if they lived in Russia (Senese, 1987, 36).²² Hesba Stretton's writing, as we have seen, exhibits throughout currents of resistance to authority; certainly, she abhorred despotism in all spheres of life, public and private. We have noted her profession of republican sentiments;²³ the strident condemnation in her texts of the Tsarist autocracy (in which Orthodox Church and State are seen as one) suggests authorial endorsement.

Admittedly, the émigrés were thought to have assimilated English ideas of reform. George Bernard Shaw was impressed by Stepniak's 'reasonableness and moderation.' (Senese, 38). The latter was greatly respected in London, and admired by such figures as Annie Besant and William Morris. Interestingly, Morris, in a speech given at Stepniak's funeral, maintained that the Russian had remained a revolutionary to the last (Johnson (ed.), 1993, 244). Fabians Hubert Bland and Edith Nesbit were frequent guests of Stepniak; as Julia Briggs suggests, he may have provided the model for the old Russian in Nesbit's The Railway Children (Briggs, 1987, 75). Stretton would doubtless have responded to the 'extra-ordinary personal magnetism' with which Stepniak dominated small gatherings, in which environment he was apparently irresistible - the only man able to reduce Shaw to silence (Senese, 37). Stepniak's contemporaries mention his facility for bridging disparate points of view and reconciling animosities (Senese, 12), a characteristic shared, at least in part, by Stretton. As this study has shown, a feature of her work, across texts and contexts, is the interrogation of constructions or perceptions of difference. In these later narratives, this continues to be effected not only through direct representation and comment, but also through shifting focalisation and contradictory/ambivalent voices.

Although Kropotkin's persona as 'gentle sage' or 'liberal saint' was misleading, and his opinions more violent than his memoirs suggest, he was remembered by contemporaries and fellow anarchists as a truly good man, driven by the need to relieve suffering (Introduction to Kropotkin/Ward (ed.), 14/15). As a woman of compassion, Stretton would have been drawn to such benevolence, and might have also have been impressed by what were deemed his 'maternal' qualities. Kropotkin is described by Ward as a

late-Victorian moralist (13), serious and devoted to plain living, and as such he might be seen as having attitudes in common with at least the legendary persona of Hesba Stretton.

Nonetheless, the views of the émigrés had consistently received a high profile, with articles by or about the anarchists appearing regularly in journals. Stepniak's espousal of anarchy and earlier justification of terrorism as a necessary means of defence were not unknown; his writings on prominent revolutionists (translated as Underground Russia, 1883) reveal that he not only knew the people concerned, but 'endorsed and enthused over their acts of terror' (Introduction to Johnson (ed.), 1993, 9).²⁴ An important article in The New Review in 1894 - the year of Stretton's first Stundist story - attacks the 'Nihilist community' in England, pointing out the revolutionary implications of their project and berating the English intellectuals for sheltering them (Introduction to Johnson (ed.) 1993, 3-4). The article does not name Stepniak as the murderer, but clearly implies it. It would be absurd to assume that all this passed Hesba Stretton by, although, like others, she no doubt to a certain extent accommodated it.²⁵

Finally, M. Nancy Cutt (1979, 130) comments, without elaboration, that Stretton may have been bored at this time. The present study has highlighted Stretton's abhorrence of the 'profound stagnation' which marked periods/lifestyles characterised by inactivity or lack of excitement, a sentiment mirrored in textual themes. I have identified an engagement, at diverse levels, with the transgressive energies present in themes or motifs which, in presenting otherness, embody elements of that otherness, thereby articulating a complex interfusion of fear, repulsion, pity and allure, and reflecting personal/cultural ambivalence. Arguably, this proximity to, and the pull exerted by, such currents, albeit peripheral/tangential, together with the attendant danger and subversive potential, is once again inherent in her association with the exotic milieu of the Russian exiles, and in her participation in their revolutionary project.

¹ In a letter to a Mr. Taylor (dated 1st March, but omitting reference to the year) Stretton expresses her thanks for the proceeds of a Sale of Work held in support of the cause, and underlines the need for private charity as a result of the restricted and conditional help provided by official sources (Osborne Collection).

² See Senese, 1987, 55 and Introduction to Kropotkin, 1899/Ward (ed.), 1978, 13. Senese suggests that although the editors of Free Russia were convinced atheists, Stepniak did believe in religious tolerance (55).

³ Kropotkin had spent a year in London in 1881 and eventually took up residence there in 1886. For further information, see Kropotkin/Ward (ed.), (1978) Memoirs of a Revolutionist.

⁴ The small, but well-known, anarchist journal The Torch was also founded during this period (1891) by the children of William Rossetti.

⁵ George Kennan was the author of Siberia and the Exile System (1891) (See Johnson (ed.), 1993, 26). Stretton was impressed by the power of Kennan's writings, and, in her preface to In the Hollow of His Hand (1897), acknowledges this Kennan text as source material for her narrative.

⁶ William Morris was, as noted later in this chapter, a member of the circle in which Stepniak moved, and was influenced by his views.

⁷ Vera Volkhovsky's mother had committed suicide. Stretton's compassion would have been aroused by her 'sad story', her motherless state, and also, no doubt, by her 'charm', as her involvement with children in her own family indicates.

⁸ The name also appears as Rudenko.

⁹ Paul Rodenko (sic) also appears in In the Hollow of His Hand (1897)

¹⁰ Cassell published The Highway of Sorrow. It has not been possible to trace surviving publishing records.

¹¹ Stretton appears to have lost touch with the group in the years following Stepniak's death.

¹² For example, in The Highway of Sorrow, Stretton describes the dark and 'fetid' conditions in which the elderly prisoner Loukyan is confined: 'every inch' of the cell walls is covered with the slime of 'innumerable swarms of creeping things', which infest his body and his bread rations; the floor is slippery with all sorts of filth. Loukyan is kicked and trampled upon, his foot deliberately crushed by the slamming of an iron door (Chs. 16 and 17).

¹³ I have discussed throughout this study the use of melodrama/sensation in Stretton's texts and the crossover between these elements and the (melo)dramatisation of poverty in journalistic accounts. In her preface to The Highway of Sorrow, she stresses that there has been 'no exaggeration', and that 'the worst has not been told'.

¹⁴ Earlier, the novelist William Westall assisted him by 'rendering into English' (that is, giving idiomatic expression, rather than translating) several texts (Senese, 1987, 28); Eleanor Marx and her husband helped with the writing of The Career of a Nihilist (1889) (Senese, 39).

¹⁵ See also Raphael Samuel (1998, 307) regarding the Bunyanesque terms in which social reports and journalistic accounts were couched. This represents an additional facet in the complex overlap of discourses which I have identified.

¹⁶

If everybody in the world would only help one another, there wouldn't be so many troubles. My father used to tell me there'd come a time when every child in England would be cared for and fed and taught, till there should be no ragged or begging children to be seen; and workhouses would become pleasant almshouses for the old people, and schools and homes for orphan children; and everybody would be happier together, rich and poor (Enoch Roden's Training, 1865, Ch.14).

From the earliest narratives, as we have seen, Stretton foregrounds exploitation of workers by those who have authority over them, and who use their power to oppress them (as, for example, in Fern's Hollow, 1864, Ch.4).

¹⁷ Garnett refers to a lecture given by Kropotkin on this subject, entitled 'Mutual aid & the struggle for life' (Garnett, in Johnson (ed.), 1989, 63)

¹⁸ In chronicling the journey to Siberia, Stretton talks of the 'better class of exiles', once again pointing up the tendency to create categories of 'otherness' and to distance protagonists from what are perceived as the worst kind of outcasts.

¹⁹ His interest leads initially to the belief that he is a Christian.

²⁰ The fact that the Stundist Paul does not confine his reading to religious works (The Highway of Sorrow, Ch.6) is stressed by Stretton, who decried the narrow outlook adopted by some of her

acquaintances, and whose own reading and interests, as this study confirms, extended far beyond such confines. Valerian, in the same text, studies in the West and reads the works of English political writers.

²¹ As in earlier texts, Stretton repeatedly invokes biblical examples regarding the treatment of women and outcasts (e.g. *In the Hollow of His Hand*, Ch.28).

²² The diverse, sometimes contradictory, interpretations of the term 'nihilism' are significant.

²³ Letter to Mrs. Pattison [1886?], University of London Archives.

²⁴ Johnson, speculating about knowledge within the London circle of Stepniak's likely role as the assassin of Mesentev (an issue which Stepniak evaded), posits the existence of a vague awareness of his involvement in terrorism and murder, fed by rumours and gradually developing into a more concrete acknowledgement.

²⁵ In understanding this, and other, unlikely alliances, the nuanced and shifting interpretations of the major 'isms' implicated in the discussion, and the consequent ambiguity/fluidity of terms, seems highly pertinent, involving selectivity and circumvention as appropriate to the various agendas and perceptions, and with the nuances of alternative meanings still present.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing investigation has highlighted the complexity of Hesba Stretton's work, and demonstrated its centrality in key areas of nineteenth-century debate/discourse, together with its participation in a network of cultural mythologies, patterns and processes. In particular, Stretton's writings can be seen to negotiate the construction and representation of alterity - from the figure of the child to the savage and back again - absorbing and generating an intricate web of ideas, meanings and experiences which operate both at the surface of the text and within the deeper structures of the narrative.

The project has uncovered 'other' stories, both in the sense of themes and perspectives hitherto unidentified/unexplored in her work, and also in terms of the stories of diverse marginalised or disenfranchised 'others'. We have encountered the outcast as both living entity, and as symbol/articulation of multiple facets of society's desires, fears, inadequacies and self-division. In its enactment of the drama of lives and relationships - the 'tragedies and comedies' so clearly identified by the narrator of The Soul of Honour (1898, Ch.11) - Stretton's work speaks to an individual and collective readership; it holds up a mirror to Victorian society, and to ourselves. It is perhaps salient to invoke Mitzi Myers's discussion (1999, 51) of the commonplace notion that we 'discover who we are through encounters with an Other - sometimes empathetic, sometimes exploitative' and her reference to the suggestion that 'every version of an "other" ... is also the construction of a self' (James Clifford, quoted in Myers, 1999, 51-2).

Hesba Stretton's work demonstrates clearly how notions of difference operate; illuminating the interplay between the 'real' and the discursively created, it exposes the manner in which authority is exercised, classifications perpetuated and identities/experiences shaped. Importantly, we have seen that interrelated patterns come into play across diverse spheres, classes, and, in certain respects, historical eras, not least because, as James Kincaid (1992, 18), reminding us of Foucault's analysis, discusses, power is present in all human relations - whether personal, institutional or

economic. Power relations/struggles take many forms, with one often standing in for another, and are continually relevant.

Assessment of the nature of Stretton's intervention reveals what Myers might have termed a 'messy' picture (1999, 50) - one fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. The personal and cultural ambivalence surrounding the various figures/classes under scrutiny is reflected and reinscribed in Stretton's work, in the language and philosophies expressed through the intermingled voices of author, narrator and characters. As in other areas of nineteenth-century discourse, competing registers in fact exist side by side; progressive engagement with the situation/grievances of the poor and outcast is shot through with innate attitudes and prejudices which reflect a concomitant investment in positioning these as inferior or 'other'. The fascination which impelled the young Stretton to 'steal' out of the house in order to join the crowd assembled to gaze at a young girl sentenced to 'do penance in a white sheet' ('A Talk with Hesba Stretton', Sunday Hours, 1896) sits alongside enlightened compassion and a determination to transform the situation of the disadvantaged or the transgressor, whatever the reason for his/her plight. As Stretton intimates in Hester Morley's Promise (1873, Ch.35), the power of seeing with other people's eyes is acquired over a lifetime; accordingly, this body of work offers the fruits of a lifetime's endeavour to understand the forces which underlie the experiences and actions of others. If Stretton's outcasts are objects of the spectator's gaze, it is at least a female and, for the most part, generous gaze.

In terms of the degree of empowerment offered by Stretton's narratives, it can be seen that the outcast is clearly exposed as subjected, victimised or commodified other, but also revealed as creative/interrogative agent. These texts foreground vulnerability and exploitation, but also the possibility of subversion and answering back, with the voice of the marginalised figure - not least that of the child and woman - harnessed to foreground injustices and, in conjunction with authorial comment, critique society. The implications of these combined strategies should not be underestimated. Moreover, the writing is infused with Stretton's underlying urge to rebel against authority and the establishment, rendering these texts simultaneously, and alternately, conservative and radical - even, at times, revolutionary; forward-looking, liberating and open, as well as reactionary, nostalgic and hegemonic. In an uncertain world, they offer both

reassurance and space for questioning and doubt, arousing interest/awareness, providing a commentary and provoking thought.

If, as Jacqueline Rose (1994, 99) suggests, a focus on morality may, in certain circumstances, function to obscure the larger social context, deflecting questions about poverty and inequality, this is not the overriding case with these writings. Stretton foregrounds the need for reform, recognising that social amelioration entails both individual and collective responses and responsibilities, and a progressive belief in material/environmental, as well as moral/spiritual transformation. Just as the protagonists of Half Brothers (1892, Ch.17) are seen to undertake schemes for 'social as well as religious improvement', these various aspects - sometimes operating in competition, sometimes complementing each other, are juxtaposed and integrated in Hesba Stretton's writing. Religion, as we have seen, emerges as a revolutionary and emancipatory as well as a restrictive force; at the same time, the impulses evidenced in Stretton's work engage with a wider movement towards the replacement of religious intensity by a preoccupation with social questions (Himmelfarb, 1991, 4).

Stretton's awareness of the need to balance diverse facets of experience is pointed up by a protagonist's plea that his clerical friend should 'write me a sermon for my romance' (Hester Morley's Promise, Ch.20). It is this hybridity, this intermingling of ideas and counterbalancing of elements which contributes to the appeal of these texts. Multiple strands operate simultaneously, interfusing material, spiritual, and archetypal concerns, blending narrative and serious ideas, fact and fantasy, satire and sympathy, pathos and practicality, gothic and pastoral, melodrama and the maternal. As a result, Stretton's writings emerge as emotionally, psychologically and politically engaged. Hesba Stretton clearly took advantage of popular forms and themes to promote pressing social, moral and spiritual agendas, to articulate the shared needs of the dispossessed or disenfranchised, and to expose - wittingly and unwittingly - wider yearnings, fears and preoccupations. She skilfully negotiated the mores of the evangelical and juvenile publishing environment to create a platform for the morally complex popular fiction she was determined to publish, and for the expression of a powerful, if sometimes contradictory, female voice. It is, in particular, the tensions, ironies and mixed motives which serve to render the work interesting and provocative - the conflicts, for example,

between the *affirmation* of order/control and the demonstration of *resistance* to order, domestication and containment.

Arguably, in its engagement with the concerns/perspectives of diverse communities and classes, Stretton's work can be seen to occupy something akin to the 'place of hybridity' identified by Mitzi Myers - a site of 'cultural mediation' where 'cultures meet and clash', offering the possibility of common understandings and identification with the 'ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others' (Myers, 1999, 47-48). In its attempt to write across various kinds of gap, it undertakes an enterprise of border crossing and bridge building. Definitive judgements are, of course, problematic, because interpretation and evaluation are dependent, in part, upon the circumstances, ideologies and value-judgements of the reader/critic, on the elements which are privileged - on whether, for example, we view waywardness or lack of civilisation as a virtue or a vice, whether we regard moral conservatism and 'old-fashioned' designations of 'good' and 'evil' as desirable or pernicious, and the extent to which we read against the grain. As discussed, these are potentially multi-layered texts, inviting multiple engagement; this investigation has uncovered a network of voices embedded within the narratives. These may be literal 'voices', in terms of the different characters/classes; they may also represent the competing abstract messages which emerge from tensions. It is appropriate only to demonstrate that various kinds of reading are possible, and to remain open to 'allowing a range of different voices to intersect in their saying of different things' (Nodelman, 2000b, 43), recognising, perhaps, that within this dialogue, the things which are articulated may, in fact, sometimes be the same.

Crucially, this study has reclaimed Stretton's stories as fertile ground for critical analysis. Lance Salway, in 1970, recognised that the influence on readers and on Victorian social attitudes of the short story Jessica's First Prayer qualified both text and author for special consideration in the history of juvenile literature (27). My exploration of Stretton's writings has established the entire range of her work as worthy of attention. The serious study of her texts contributes to a better understanding of the oeuvre, and of the wider context of its production; the project has relevance for the literary/cultural historian and, somewhat surprisingly, for a modern audience and world. We are likely, perhaps, to engage with those Freudian 'uncanny dramas of self-reflexivity' which entail the disturbing 'discovery of the psychological and political

secrets in “remote corners of [one’s] own being” (Myers, 1999, 48). It has been my intention to open up readings, pushing interpretation to the boundaries, in order to stimulate discussion and encourage further investigation into areas of Stretton’s work, based on diverse approaches to literary analysis, intertextual and comparative study. If Hesba Stretton’s writings speak of, and furnish, experiences which can offer what John Berger (quoted in Myers, 1999, 52) terms ‘*other* ways of telling’, my study provides and invites ‘other ways of looking’ at this essentially outcast body of work.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I:

SUMMARY OF HAND-WRITTEN ACCOUNT BY HESBA STRETTON ON 'THE ORIGIN OF THE LONDON S.P.C.C.' (APRIL 1908)

A hand-written account on 'The Origin of the London S.P.C.C.' by Hesba Stretton, dated 4th April 1908 (Shropshire Records and Research, Ref. 6000/19290) firmly sets out the part played by Stretton and her sister in bringing together the main parties involved in the formation of the Society. Stretton records her contact, through friends, with Mr. Agnew, recent founder of a society in Liverpool along the lines of the organisation he had visited in the United States. Impressed by his work, Stretton made appeals through The Times for the setting up of a London Society, and sought the support of prominent persons; despite receiving some objections, she obtained positive responses from several contacts, including Florence Davenport Hill, who promised to raise the matter in important circles. Progress was slow, and after meeting with Agnew in London and enlisting the help of 'literary people' such as W.T. Stead, apparently to little effect, Stretton sought the help of Dr. Billing, Rector of an East End Parish. Dr. Billing supplied her with an introduction to the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, who had in fact already formed a 'little' society for the same purpose; on hearing about Agnew's Liverpool project, however, the Baroness, together with colleagues abandoned the earlier venture and promised adherence to the new scheme.

Stretton then worked to secure a London address, contacting her friend, Benjamin Waugh, then editor of the Sunday Magazine, and other acquaintances, including a Leicester MP. Eventually they were allocated space in the premises of Isbister, from which Stretton and her sister 'wrote hundreds of letters, and made unnumbered calls, gathering friends and influence'. Although Stretton favoured designating the society 'National' from the start, this was not deemed possible at the time in view of the already existing local societies. With regard to the public meeting arranged at The Mansion House (at which the first Committee was formed), Stretton claims credit for pressing urgently for the Egyptian Hall, as well as for asking Cardinal Manning to attend, and Lord Shaftesbury to lead the meeting and become President. Some months later

Stretton attended the opening of the Shelter, the finding of premises for which she attributes to her nephew. Stretton wrote to Agnew on 14.7.1884, to express her gratitude for his work in advancing the formation of the London Society (NSPCC Archives).

A letter to Lord Ancaster containing Stretton's resignation (15.12.1894, NSPCC Archives), and expressing her regret at being compelled to leave a Committee on which she had served (and colleagues with whom she had worked) since its formation, indicates that, as a result of the Hon. Director having 'forbidden the auditors to give any information to any member of the Executive', Stretton could not 'continue liable for expenditure and debt over which I have no control, and of which I can obtain no information'.

APPENDIX II:

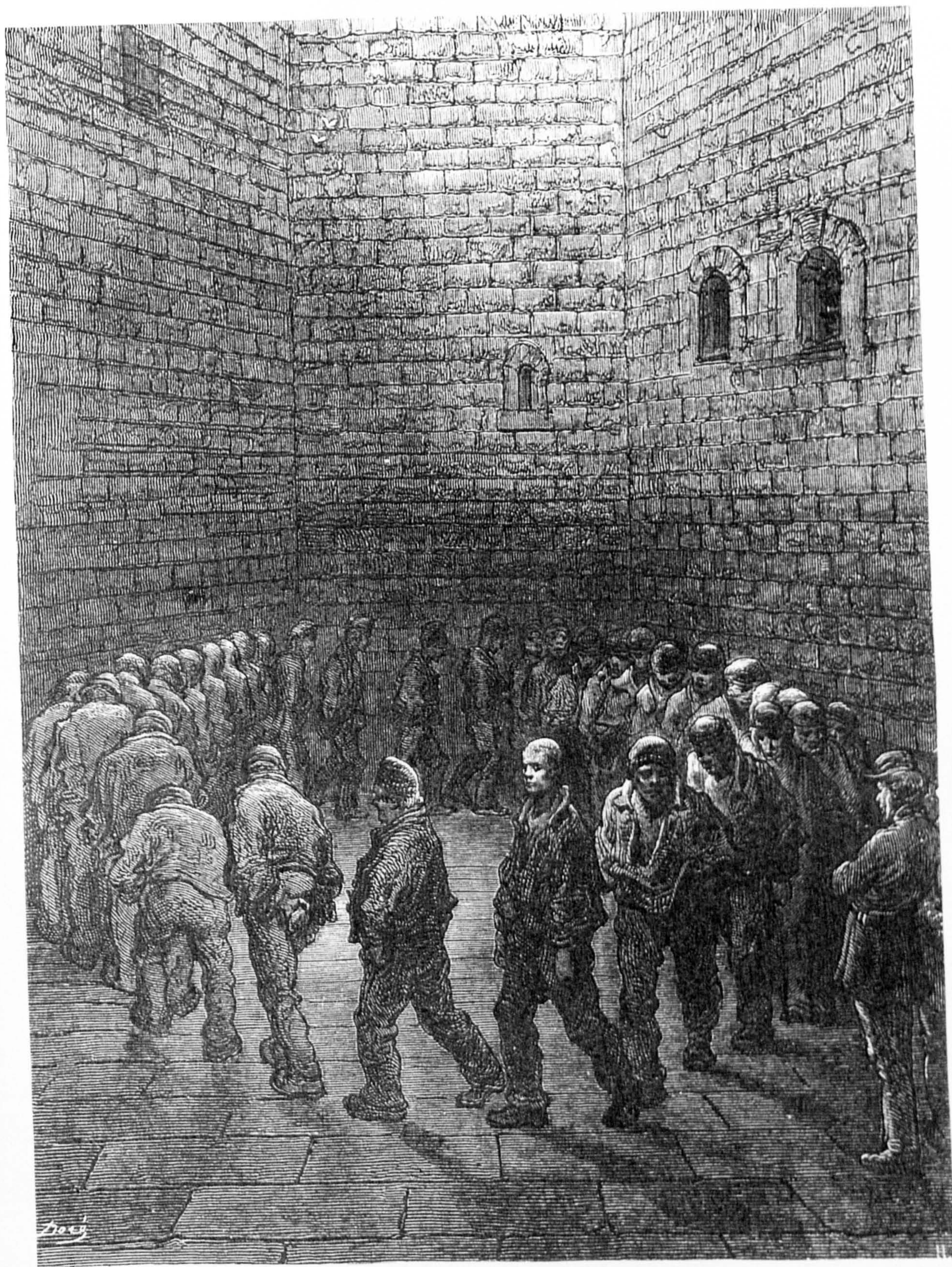
INTERTEXTUAL IMAGES - ART AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Ila

Gustave Doré

‘Newgate, Exercise Yard’ (London, A Pilgrimage, 1872)

reproduced in Treuherz (1987, 68, Plate 58).



IIa

IIb

Illustration to Stretton's Pilgrim Street
(1867/Edition inscribed 1890, Ch.17)

with daisies and moss, into which their feet sank softly and soundlessly. Every now and then they came to dingles, in whose hollows the tall ferns grew, and down



whose sloping sides the children rolled themselves with shrieks of laughter. Sometimes there lay before them solemn glades, stretching far away, like the long aisles of some grand cathedral, with boughs arching and

Ilb

IIc

Illustration to Stretton's In Prison and Out

(1880, Ch. 2)



“ He met with rebuffs, and felt downcast.”

He

IId

Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)

‘Alice Liddell as “The Beggar Maid”’ (c.1859)

reproduced in Higonnet (1998, 124, Plate 59)



Ид

Ile

Illustration to Stretton's Jessica's First Prayer
(1867/n.d., frontispiece)

IIf

Illustration to Stretton's The Lord's Pursebearers
(1883/n.d., Ch. 2)



IIe



IIf

IIg

Illustration to Stretton's Carola
(1884/Edition inscribed 1898, Ch.12)



IIg

IIh

Frederick Walker ‘ The Lost Path’ (1863)

reproduced in Treuherz (1987, 50, Plate 35)

IIi

Detail from: Luke Fildes ‘Houseless and Hungry’ (Graphic 1869)

reproduced in Treuherz (1987, 54, Plate 38)



IIIh



IIIi

IIj

Illustration to Stretton's Bede's Charity
(1872/Edition c.1890, Ch. 25)



HOMELESS, BUT NOT FRIENDLESS.

IIj

IIk

Illustration to Stretton's The Storm of Life

(1876/Edition inscribed 1910, Ch.4)

shivering. The snow and frost were not gone yet and the child's thin bare arms, with no other covering than the grey workhouse cloak, were blue with cold,



and her eyes, almost hidden by the green shade, were inflamed with crying and by the keen biting wind that whistled through the leafless branches of the

IIIk

Im

William Mulready ‘The Lesson’ (1859)

reproduced in Holdsworth and Crossley (1992, 4)



Ilm

II n

John Thompson 'The Crawlers'

from Street Life in London (1877)

reproduced in Stedman Jones (1984, Plate 5)

II p

Illustration to Stretton's Jessica's Mother

[1904]/Edition inscribed 1912 (frontispiece)



Ип



Ир

IIq

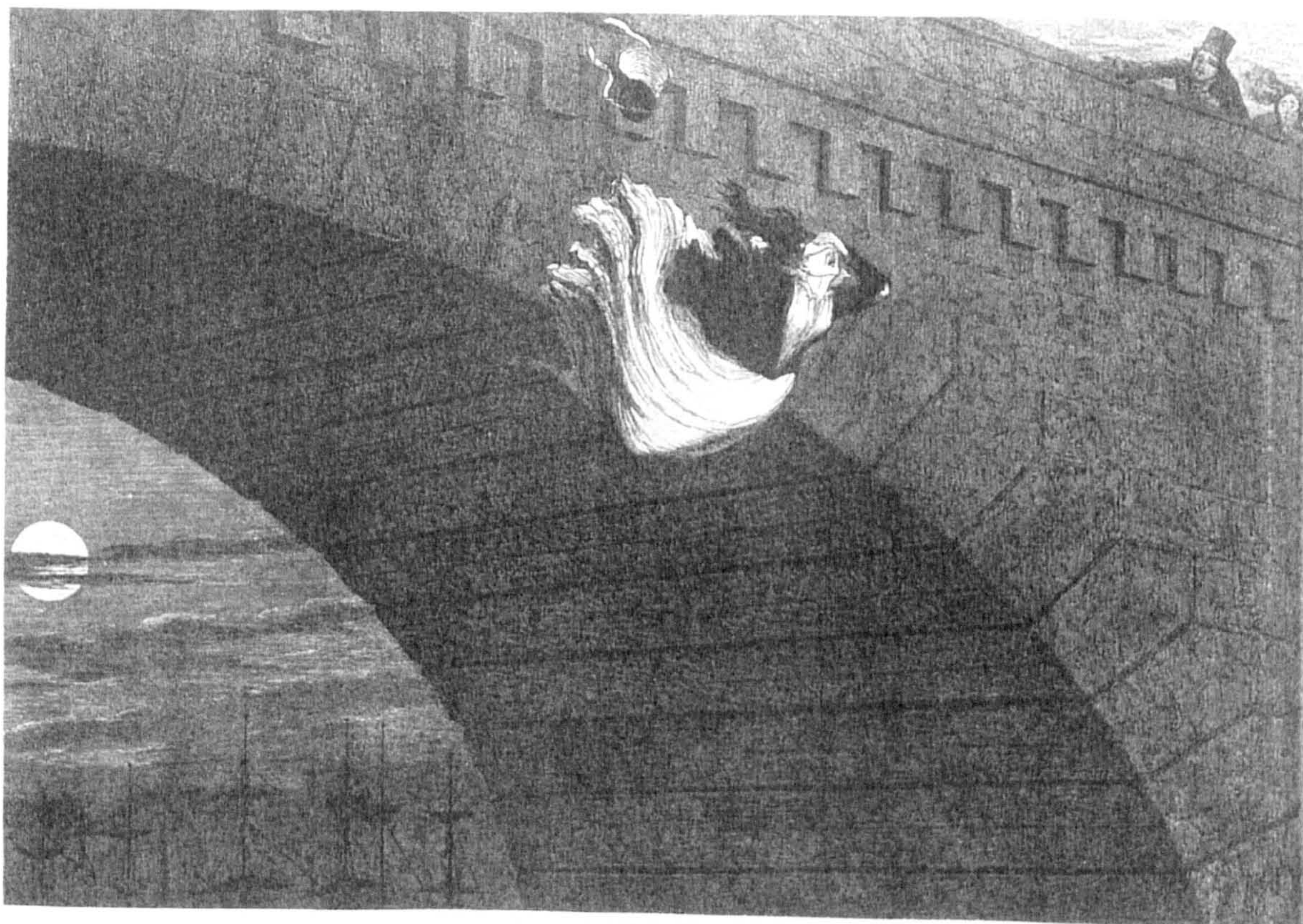
George Cruikshank 'The poor girl, homeless, friendless, deserted, and gin mad, commits self-murder' from The Drunkard's Children (1848) reproduced in Treuherz (1987, 23, Plate 10)

IIr

Gustave Doré (1878) illustration to Thomas Hood 'The Bridge of Sighs' reproduced in Nead (1988, Plate 29)

IIs

(W. Gray) 'Found' in W. Hayward London by Night (c.1870) reproduced in Nead (1988, Plate 32)



IIq



IIr



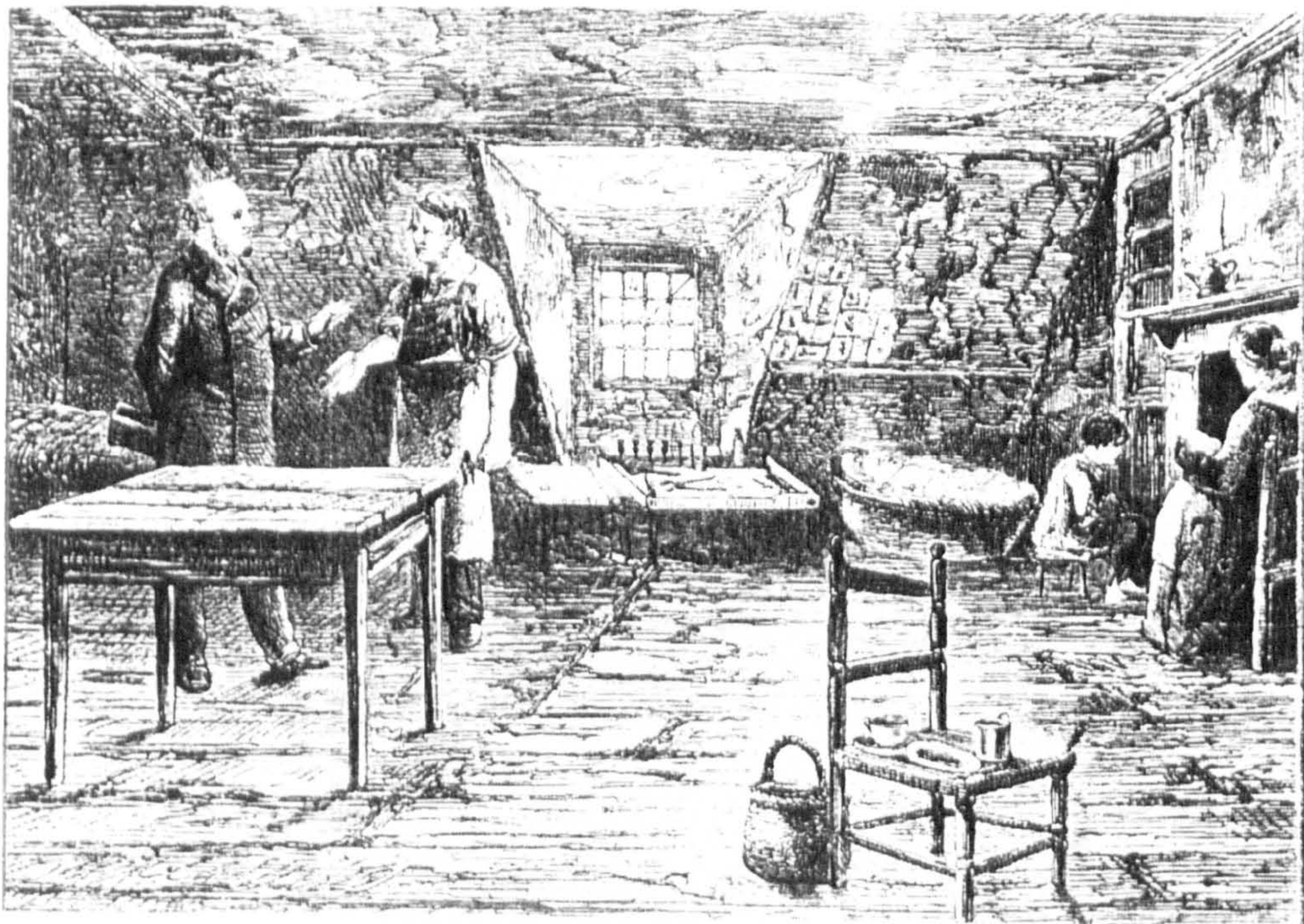
IIs

III t

‘Poor Garret in Bethnal Green’ (1863, Mansell Collection)
reproduced in Stedman Jones (1984, Plate 3)

III u

Illustration to Stretton’s Bede’s Charity
(1872/Edition c.1890, Ch.18)



It



UNDER THE TREES IN THE PARK.

He

Iv

Gustave Doré ‘The Bull’s Eye’ (London, A Pilgrimage, 1872)

reproduced in Treuherz (1987, 67, Plate 57).



Иv

IIw

Illustration to Stretton's The King's Servants

(1873/Edition inscribed 1911, Part 3, Ch. 7)

IIx

Illustration to Stretton's The Storm of Life

(1876/Edition inscribed 1910, Ch. 7)



IIw



IIx

A TALL POLICEMAN CAME UP AND STOOD OVER THEM.

Ily

Illustration to Stretton's Pilgrim Street
(1867/Edition inscribed 1890, Ch.12)

Ilyz

Illustration to Stretton's A Thorny Path
(1879/n.d., Ch. 3)



Ил



Ил

APPENDIX III:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY ON 'GIPSY GLIMPSES' (1869)

The article 'Gipsy Glimpses' (All The Year Round, 8.5.1869) is evidently based on Stretton's experiences at this time; it is rendered as a factual account and details encounters which clearly feed into her fictional narratives. It charts events during a visit to a gypsy encampment, and the subsequent attendance by the gypsy community at a reception held in their honour at the local Old Hall. Exemplifying the ambivalence characteristic of contemporary attitudes towards the exotic/marginalised 'other', and embodying all the contradictions of Stretton's own response, the piece frames the gypsies simultaneously as active and creative agents and as objects of interest/the outsider's gaze. The gypsies appear as colourful, mysterious and slightly unsettling players in an entertaining spectacle in which superstition and perceptions of shared humanity intermingle. When the official part of the visit to the camp is declared over by the gypsies, the visitors cannot resist prolonging and accentuating their voyeurism by looking through the peepholes in the tent.

The account evidences a mixture of fascination, fear, mistrust and condescension on the part of the writer and resident community; there is a desire to reach out, to listen, to embrace difference and dissolve negative distinctions, yet at the same time a need to distance and maintain boundaries, to preserve the different facets of otherness. The community is described as a 'vagrant tribe'; they are later perceived as 'strange' guests and reference is made to 'native wildness'. The image of the snarling dog, on guard in the muddy encampment, reinforces the expected aura of superstition and fear; the visitors to the camp are urged by the fortune-telling gypsies not to be afraid. Such unsettling images exist alongside depictions of cosy tent interiors, where sturdy, resourceful women create a homely and welcoming environment. The crimsons, purples and ambers of the furnishings, the brilliantly coloured rugs and blankets, immense cooking pots and richly painted china, all add to the poetic air of 'luxury and romance'; the warm colouring and picturesque apparel, the peculiar grace and freedom

of the gypsies are considered noteworthy. Descriptions of the curly black head of the gypsy child, the baby with its 'shrewd, small fortune-telling face' and 'bead-like eyes with very little look of babyhood in them', reflect impressions and embody deeply rooted beliefs/mythologies. The article encapsulates and epitomises the various facets of the gypsy image, resonating with wider literary and artistic representations, and finding echoes in texts such as Lost Gip, Cassy (in which diverse aspects are appropriated) and other narratives. Underlining, once again, the urge to create/maintain distinctions, there is reportedly a tendency for those of 'the true gypsy race', to distance themselves from the Epping Forest gypsies, who are perceived as 'a mongrel lot' with 'low and dirty habits'.

The reaction of the resident community is grounded in perceptions of the gypsy as inferior in terms of behaviour and gentility. There emerges an almost comical degree of surprise at, and respect for, the unanticipated measure of dignity, composure and civilised conduct displayed by the gypsy group at the reception. They are observed to behave like 'any other gentlemen'; there is little to indicate that they are not 'to the manner born'. The narrator notes - apparently without irony - the failure on behalf of the gypsies to breach etiquette in any significant way (one proclaims rather too loudly his discovery of the hot buttered cakes). The ease, self-possession, honesty and courtesy of the guests, their 'intelligent foreheads' and superiority to other lower class groups are admiringly documented. Such a response serves to betray, at the same time as it seeks to interrogate and reshape, dominant assumptions about, and attitudes towards, those in society whose difference potentially both intrigues and inspires fear, uncertainty or suspicion, and whose image is alternately romanticised, vilified and denigrated. It also points up the preoccupation with definitions of civilisation, and the influence of cultural perceptions upon material experiences and responses.